

March-April 2016

Video Librarian

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Spotlight Review

The Danish Girl

★★★★1/2
Universal, 120 min., R,
DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray:
\$34.98, Mar. 1



Eddie Redmayne followed up his Oscar-winning turn as astrophysicist Stephen Hawking in *The Theory of Everything* with another amazing transformation and Oscar nomination here—becoming Lili Elbe, one of the first identifiable individuals to undergo sex-reassignment surgery. The year 2015 witnessed the Supreme Court's landmark legalization of same-sex marriage, Caitlyn Jenner's transgender transition, and the huge success of Amazon's *Transparent* TV series. Back in 1926 in Denmark, however, the transgender concept frustrated and bewildered psychiatrists, who labeled it perversion. When renowned landscape artist Einar Wegener (Redmayne) starts to wear makeup and clothing belonging to his ambitious-but-struggling portrait-painter wife Gerda (Oscar nominee Alicia Vikander), Copenhagen's traditionally tolerant artistic community

is taken aback. Married for six years, Einar enjoys a lusty conjugal life with Gerda—until, one day, she asks him to don stockings, tutu, and satin slippers to fill in for a missing model. Sensing his delight in posing in feminine finery, she suggests Einar attend a party, masquerading as a cousin named Lili. What neither of them expects is that demure Lili will attract amorous attention. And then Gerda's erotically charged portraits of Lili sell, bringing Gerda fame and fortune. When the couple move to cosmopolitan Paris, Lili grows more confident with experimentation, puzzling his boyhood friend/crush (Matthias Schoenaerts), who develops romantic feelings toward Gerda. Eventually, Lili turns to an understanding German doctor (Sebastian Koch) who will attempt risky and revolutionary gender-reassignment surgery. Adapted from David Ebershoff's titular 2000 novel, and sensitively directed by Tom Hooper, this is highly recommended. (S. Granger)

VL at PLA

Video Librarian will be exhibiting at the Public Library Association conference in Denver from April 6-8. Please drop by our booth (#1454) to say hello!

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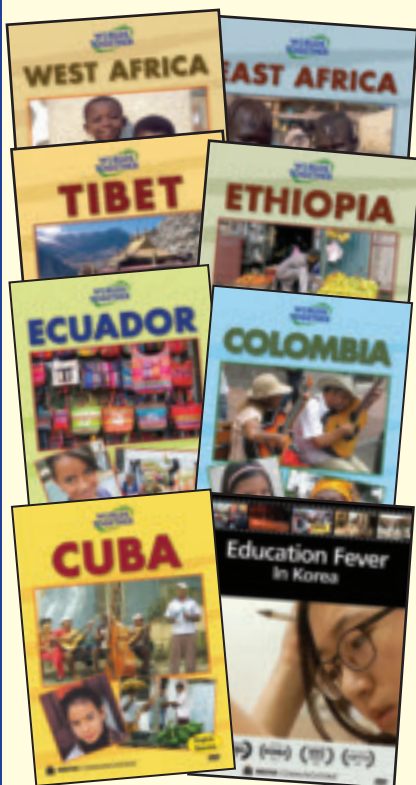
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Video Newsbriefs

Ken Burns's "Jackie Robinson" Doc Coming April 12 from PBS Distribution

Coinciding with the TV premiere, PBS Distribution will release Ken Burns's *Jackie Robinson* (DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99) on April 12. Directed by Ken Burns, Sarah Burns, and David McMahon, the documentary tells the story of Jack Roosevelt Robinson, who rose from humble origins to break baseball's color barrier. Born in 1919 to tenant farmers in rural Georgia and raised in Pasadena, CA, Robinson confronted institutional racism long before he integrated Major League Baseball. In 1949, Robinson began to speak out, challenging opposing players, arguing with umpires, and talking to the press, while also playing some of the best baseball of his career, and winning that year's National League MVP award. After his sports career was over, Robinson continued to use his fame to further the Civil Rights movement, voicing his views through a widely read newspaper column in the *New York Post*, raising money for the NAACP and Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and campaigning vigorously for candidates he believed would work to improve the lives of African Americans. The documentary features extensive interviews with Robinson's widow, Rachel, and their surviving children, Sharon and David; President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama; former Dodgers teammates Don Newcombe, Carl Erskine, and Ralph Branca; writers Howard Bryant and Gerald Early; and celebrities Harry Belafonte, Tom Brokaw, and Carly Simon. Featuring Oscar-winner Jamie Foxx as the voice of Jackie Robinson, the film is narrated by Keith David and features original music by Wynton Marsalis.

Music Box Films Doc "She's Beautiful When She's Angry" Arriving March 1 for Women's History Month

In celebration of Women's History Month, Music Box Films will release *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* (DVD: \$29.95) on March 1. Offering an insightful, rousing, and often humorous account of the birth and rise of the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s up through its contemporary manifestations in the new millennium, director Mary Dore's film combines rarely-seen archival footage, a classic

soundtrack of the era, and first-person stories of the protests, poetry slams, and community meetings that drove a national campaign that brought about meaningful social change. Telling the story of the grassroots movement that proclaimed "the personal is political," while also spotlighting the women who dared to voice their anger, *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* features commentary from activists and writers including Chude Pam Allen, Judith Arcana, Nona Willis Aronowitz, and Fran Beal. Delivering a fine tribute to past bravery and determination, the film also serves as a warning and urgent rallying cry to the next wave of those determined to ensure equal rights for all.



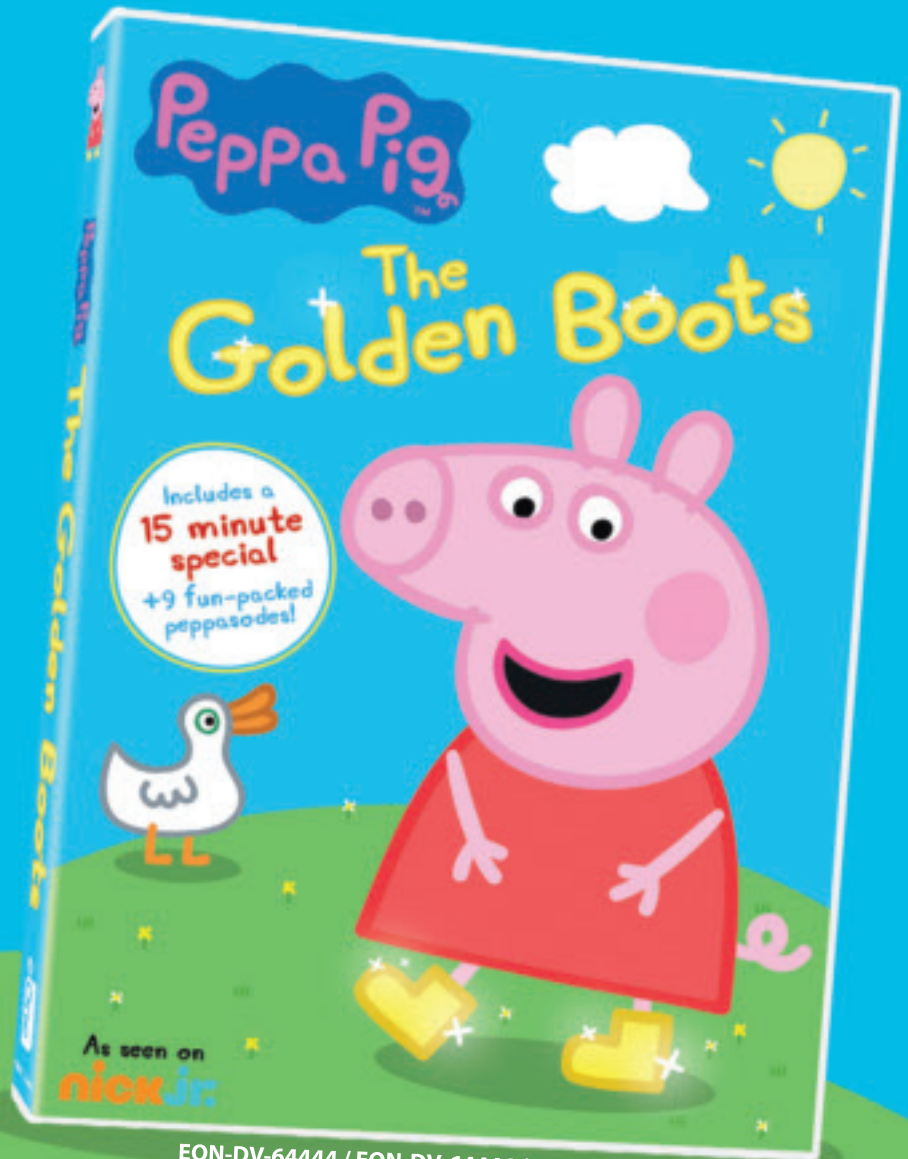
"Bicycle Thieves" and "The Manchurian Candidate" on Criterion Collection's March Slate

This March, Criterion presents an interesting variety of world cinema titles. Slated for March 8 is late French New Wave director Jacques Rivette's debut, 1961's *Paris Belongs to Us* (DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95), which follows a young literature student (Betty Schneider) and a loose-knit group of twentysomethings in Paris. Coming March 15 is John Frankenheimer's iconic 1962 Cold War paranoia thriller *The Manchurian Candidate* (DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95), a razor-sharp adaptation of the novel by Richard Condon that stars Frank Sinatra, Laurence Harvey, and Angela Lansbury. Arriving March 22 is Edward Yang's intimate 1991 Taiwanese epic *A Brighter Summer Day* (DVD: 3 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.95), based on the true story of a young teenager's (Chen Chang) fall from innocence into juvenile delinquency. Slated for March 29 is Les Blank's exhilarating 1974 free-form documentary *A Poem Is a Naked Person* (DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95), showcasing the life and career of legendary Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Leon Russell. Also bowing March 29 is the Blu-ray debut of Italian director Vittorio De Sica's 1948 landmark film *Bicycle Thieves* (Blu-ray: \$39.95), an Oscar-winning Italian neorealist classic set in poverty-stricken postwar Rome that centers on a man searching for his stolen bicycle.

Shiny New Release!

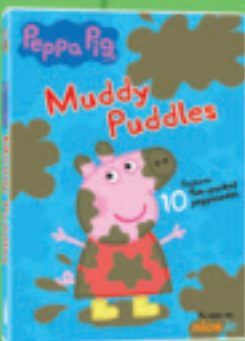
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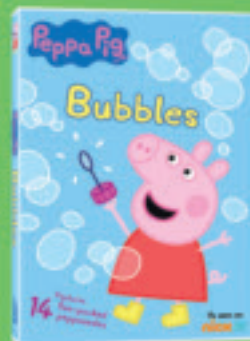
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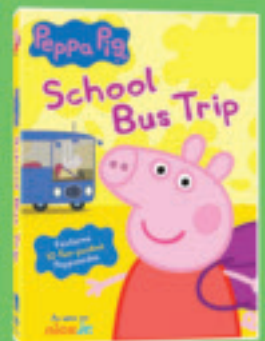
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See you in Baltimore

Books Into Movies

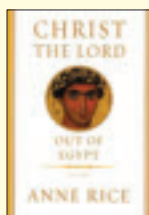
The following films based on books are slated to open during March and April. Movie release dates are subject to change.

Coming in March

Whiskey Tango Fox-trot (Mar. 4) is based on journalist Kim Barker's 2011 memoir *The Taliban Shuffle: Strange Days in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Directed by Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, the dark war comedy stars Margot Robbie, Martin Freeman, and Tina Fey as Barker.



The Young Messiah (Mar. 11) is based on Anne Rice's 2005 novel *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*. Directed by Cyrus Nowrasteh, the biblical drama stars Sean Bean, David Bradley, Isabelle Adriani, and Adam Greaves-Neal as Jesus.



Miracles from Heaven (Mar. 16) is based on author Christy Beam's 2015 faith-based memoir about her ill daughter. Directed by Patricia Riggen, the film stars Jennifer Garner, Kylie Rogers, Martin Henderson, and Queen Latifah.



The Divergent Series: Allegiant (Mar. 18) is based on the 2013 third novel in Veronica Roth's dystopian sci-fi YA series. Directed by Robert Schwentke, the sci-fi adventure sequel stars Shailene Woodley, Theo James, and Octavia Spencer.



The Little Prince (Mar. 18) is adapted from French aristocrat Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's 1943 novella. Directed by Mark Osborne, this stop-motion and computer-animated film features the voices of Jeff Bridges, Rachel McAdams, Benicio del Toro, and Ricky Gervais.

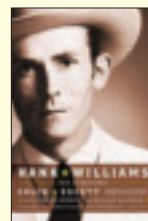


The Program (Mar. 18) is based on journalist David Walsh's 2013 book *Seven*

Deadly Sins: My Pursuit of Lance Armstrong. Directed by Stephen Frears, the film stars Guillaume Canet, Dustin Hoffman, Chris O'Dowd as Walsh, and Ben Foster as Armstrong.



I Saw the Light (Mar. 25) is based on Colin Escott, George Merritt, and William MacEwen's 1994 *Hank Williams: The Biography*. Directed by Marc Abraham, this tribute stars Elizabeth Olsen, David Krumholtz, and Tom Hiddleston as Williams.

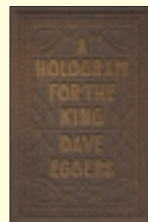


Coming in April

The Jungle Book (Apr. 15) is adapted from the classic 1894 story collection by Rudyard Kipling. Director Jon Favreau's animated remake of the 1967 Disney classic features voice work by Bill Murray, Ben Kingsley, and Idris Elba.



A Hologram for the King (Apr. 22) is adapted from Dave Eggers's 2012 National Book Award finalist novel. Directed by Tom Tykwer, the comedy stars Tom Hanks, Tom Skerritt, and Sarita Choudhury.



Same Kind of Different As Me (Apr. 29) is based on the 2006 *New York Times* nonfiction bestseller by Ron Hall and Denver Moore with Lynn Vincent. Directed by Michael Carney, the drama stars Renée Zellweger, Djimon Hounsou, and Jon Voight.



Looking Ahead

Slated for May is *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, based on Lewis Carroll's 1871 novel *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. Director Tim Burton's sequel features returning stars Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, and Mia Wasikowska.



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RABIN, THE LAST DAY

For many Israelis, the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 marked a grim turning point for their country. In this brave and provocative new film, Amos Gitai sets out to prove Rabin's assassination was the culmination of a hate campaign by the rabbis and public figures of Israel's far right.

"I hope a lot of Americans see this film-for the warning it offers."
-Thomas Friedman, The New York Times

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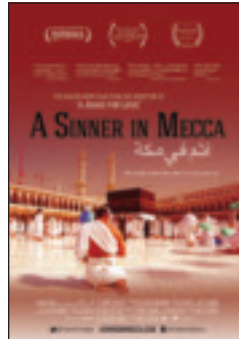


DREAM/KILLER

When teenaged Ryan Erickson was wrongly arrested for a brutal murder, he assumed that he'd soon be released. But it turned out to be only the beginning of a long nightmare involving corrupt police and attorneys, and resulting in years of unjust incarceration. A nerve-chilling case that reveals disturbing problems with American justice.

"...elicits large measures of incredulity, frustration and astonishment...fast-paced and frightening." -The New York Times

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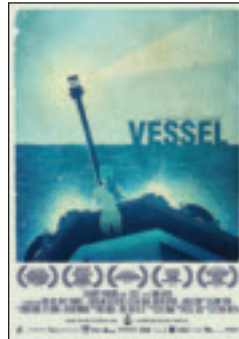
A SINNER IN MECCA

Gay filmmaker Parvez Sharma risked imprisonment and death to secretly film his holy pilgrimage, a journey that reveals previously unseen aspects of The Hajj and one man's quest to reconcile his faith with the religion that rejected him.

NEW YORK TIMES CRITICS PICK

"Wrenching...gritty...surreal and transcendent; Visceral and abstract... an undeniable act of courage and hope." -The Hollywood Reporter

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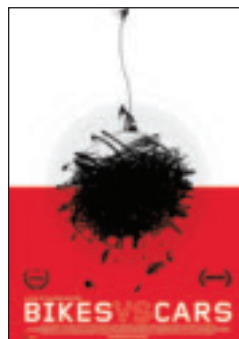


VESSEL

In the face of violent resistance, a crusading Dutch physician outfits an oceangoing boat to provide abortions for women in countries where it's illegal. Soon, she and her group of activists contrive a way for women to help themselves safely and privately using WHO-approved protocols.

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-Hollywood Reporter

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"Strong notes of hope and of bone-deep identity..."
-The Hollywood Reporter

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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.

March 6—March 12

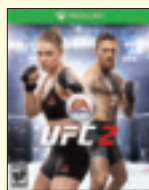
The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess HD (Nintendo, WiiU: \$59.99, Rated: T). In this remaster of the GameCube/Wii third-person adventure-RPG, players lead Link on a quest that will take him to the farthest corners of Hyrule and beyond to restore light to the world.

Tom Clancy's The Division (Ubisoft, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this third-person action game, players become a member of The Division, an autonomous unit of tactical agents trained to operate independently as a devastating pandemic sweeps New York City.



March 13—March 19

EA Sports UFC 2 (EA, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: T). This latest entry in the mixed martial arts fighting series features improved character likeness and animation, and adds an all new knockout physics system as fighters are invited to step back into the Octagon.



Samurai Warriors 4 Empires (Koei Tecmo, PS4: \$49.99, Rated: T). In this alternative version of the events depicted in *Samurai Warriors 4*, players combine third-person action with strategy as a member in the lower ranks of the army who gradually rises to eventually rule the entire land through conquest.

March 20—March 26

Lichdom: Battlemage (Maximum, PS4/XOne: \$49.99, Rated: M). In this first-person fantasy action game, players step into the role of Dragon, a scorned mage out

to seek revenge on Shax—the evil overlord who destroyed his family—using an arsenal of spells to fight off hordes of cult members, monsters, and demons.

Republique (GungHo, PS4: \$24.99, Rated: M). In this third-person action game, the player is Hope, a young woman held captive inside Metamorphosis—a shadowy totalitarian state ruled by the omnipresent Overseer—who embarks on a treacherous and thrilling journey to freedom.



March 27—April 2

MLB The Show 16 (Sony, PS3/PS4: \$39.99–\$59.99, Rated: E). This year's edition of the long-running baseball simulation franchise offers gameplay improvements, new game modes, and more personalization options.

Nights of Azure (Koei Tecmo, PS4: \$59.99, Rated: RP). Set on an uncharted island floating in the North Sea, this third-person action-RPG tells a tragic tale of two friends faced with impossible decisions that will test their loyalty to their quest and to each other.

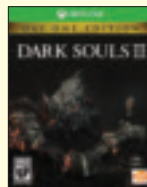
April 3—April 9

Quantum Break (Microsoft, XOne: \$59.99, Rated: M). From the creators of *Max Payne* and *Alan Wake*, this third-person action-adventure game finds players in the role of Jack Joyce, who is able to bend and shape time in order to outmaneuver and outwit the enemy.

April 10—April 16

DiRT Rally (Codemasters, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: E). This rally racing game sends players hurtling along dangerous, undulating roads at breakneck speed, trying to balance every advantage they can gain from their cars against that one crash that could irreparably harm their stage time.

Dark Souls III (From Software, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: RP). This critically-acclaimed and genre-defining third-person action-adventure series continues with this highly-anticipated third entry that will pit players against massive bosses in extremely demanding battles.



April 17—April 23

Assetto Corsa (505 Games, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: E). This racing simulation game features over 100 hundred cars and more than 20 tracks, emphasizing pure physics realism to offer meticulously precise car handling.

April 24—April 30

Mafia III (2K, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: RP). In this third-person action game set in 1968 in a reimagined New Orleans, players step into the shoes of Lincoln Clay, a Vietnam veteran set on escaping a criminal past.

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End

(Sony, PS4: \$59.99, Rated: RP). In this highly-anticipated third-person action-adventure game, players resume the beloved role of Nathan Drake several years after his last adventure, as the retired fortune hunter is forced back into the world of thieves in a globetrotting journey.

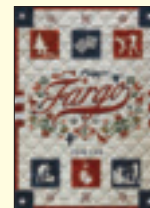


TV on DVD/Blu-ray

Available Now

Doctor Who: Series Nine, Part Two (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$24.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$29.98). The Doctor (Peter Capaldi) and companion Clara (Jenna Coleman) deal with extreme challenges in this second compilation from the 2015 ninth series of the cult sci-fi series.

Fargo: Year Two (Fox, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.99). Set in 1979, this 2015 second season of the FX-aired crime dramedy based on the popular 1996 Coen brothers feature film stars Kirsten Dunst, Patrick Wilson, Jean Smart, and Ted Danson.



Girls: The Complete Fourth Season (HBO, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). This 2015 fourth season of the Lena Dunham-created dramedy series features guest appearances by Jason Ritter and Zachary Quinto.

Jesus of Nazareth: The Complete Miniseries (Shout! Factory, DVD: 2 discs, \$19.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$24.98). Director

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THE IRON MINISTRY



Filmed over three years on China's railways, J. P. Sniadecki's masterful documentary immerses audiences in fleeting relationships and uneasy encounters between humans and machines on what will soon be the world's largest railway network.'

"Moving, revelatory, and often funny."

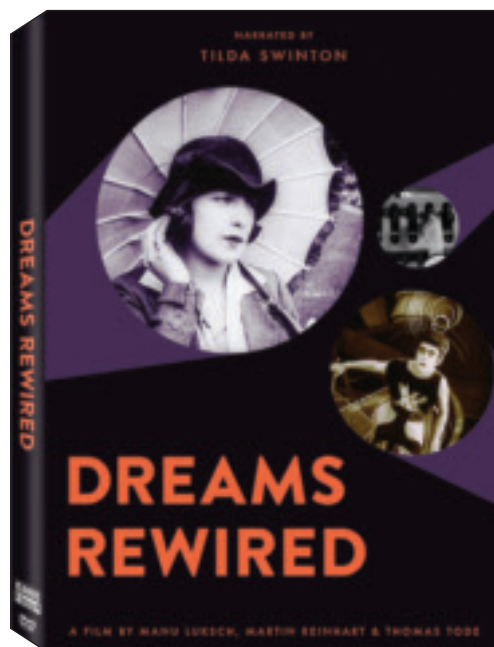
-The Village Voice

A film by J.P. Sniadecki
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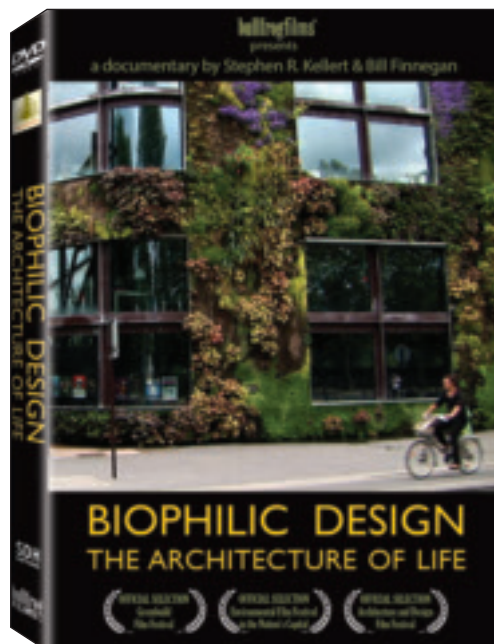
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Franco Zeffirelli's depiction of the life and times of Jesus Christ is portrayed in this star-studded 1977 miniseries featuring Anne Bancroft, James Earl Jones, Laurence Olivier, Christopher Plummer, and Anthony Quinn.

The Leftovers: The Complete Second Season (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$44.98). A retired police chief relocates his family in the wake of the sudden disappearance of millions of the world's population in this 2015 sophomore season starring Justin Theroux, Amy Brenneman, Christopher Eccleston, and Liv Tyler.

The Lizzie Borden Chronicles (Sony, DVD: 2 discs, \$26.99). Set after the titular notorious axe murderer's 1893 acquittal, this 2015 Lifetime-aided miniseries stars Christina Ricci, Clea DuVall, and Cole Hauser.



Peaky Blinders: Series Two (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$34.98). Headed up by the vicious Tommy Shelby (Cillian Murphy), the titular Birmingham gang continues to gain a hold in the underworld in this 2014 second series of the BBC Two-aided historical crime drama, also starring Helen McCrory, Sam Neill, and Tom Hardy.

Saints & Strangers (Sony, DVD: \$26.99). Aired on the National Geographic Channel, this 2015 two-part miniseries chronicling the arrival of the Mayflower and the first Thanksgiving stars Ray Stevenson, Anna Camp, Vincent Kartheiser, and Natascha McElhone.

Togetherness: The Complete First Season (HBO, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$49.99). Two SoCal families cohabitate in this 2015 first season of the HBO comedy series starring Mark Duplass, Melanie Lynskey, and Amanda Peet.

March 1

The Americans: The Complete Third Season (Fox, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.99). Undercover married Russian spies Philip and Elizabeth (Matthew Rhys and Keri Russell) are concerned that their teen daughter is being recruited by the KGB in this 2015 third season of the Cold War period drama series.



The Bold Ones: The New Doctors—The Complete Series (Shout! Factory, DVD: 9 discs, \$59.99). This 1969-73 addition to the rotating format series is set at a cutting-edge medical clinic and stars E.G. Marshall, John Saxon, and David Hartman.



Childhood's End (Universal, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$34.98). Powerful aliens bring their own particular brand of peace to Earth in this three-part Syfy-aided miniseries adaptation of the 1953 novel by Arthur C. Clarke, starring Mike Vogel, Daisy Betts, Charles Dance, and Colm Meaney.

Death in Paradise: Season Four (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). Two new members join the team to solve mysteries in a fictional island paradise in this 2015 fourth season of the crime comedy series starring Kris Marshall, Joséphine Jobert, and Tobi Bakare.

The Fall: Series 1 (Acorn, Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.99). Aired in the U.S. on Netflix, this 2013 first season of the BBC series following a British detective (Gillian Anderson) sent to Belfast to review a seemingly unsolvable murder is newly available on high-definition Blu-ray. Also newly available is **The Fall: Series 2** (DVD or Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.99).



Scott and Bailey: Season Four (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). Stars Suranne Jones, Lesley Sharp, and Amelia Bullmore are back in this 2014 fourth season from the ITV-aided detective drama.

Silk: Season Two (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). Martha Costello (Maxine Peake) comes back to Shoe Lane Chambers after earning her status as Queen's Counsel in this 2012 sophomore season following the lives and careers of contemporary barristers.

Strike Back: Final Season—Cinemax Season Four (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$34.98). Based on the novel by former Special Air Service soldier Chris Ryan, this 2015 fifth and final season of the globetrotting original Cinemax series stars Philip Winchester, Sullivan Stapleton, and Robson Green.

Z Nation: Season 2 (Universal, DVD: 3

discs, \$39.98). Kellita Smith, Keith Allan, and Anastasia Baranova star in this 2015 sophomore season of the post-apocalyptic horror series aired on Syfy.

March 8

Community: The Complete Sixth Season (Sony, DVD: 2 discs, \$45.99). Premiering on Yahoo! Screen after its NBC cancellation, this 2015 sixth and final season of the community college comedy series features guest appearances by Seth Green, Steve Guttenberg, and Billy Zane.

Manhattan: Season Two (Lionsgate, DVD: 3 discs, \$34.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$34.98). Set during the 1940s when the atomic bomb was first created in New Mexico, this 2015 second and final season of the WGN America drama series stars John Benjamin Hickey, Olivia Williams, and Daniel Stern.



Rookie Blue: The Final Season (Entertainment One, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98). The officers of 15 Division say goodbye in this 2015 sixth and final season of the Canadian police drama starring Missy Peregrym, Gregory Smith, Erika Okuma, and Charlotte Sullivan.

The Spoils of Babylon (IFC, DVD: 2 discs, \$24.98). Will Ferrell, Tobey Maguire, Kristen Wiig, Tim Robbins, Jessica Alba, and Michael Sheen star in this 2014 IFC-aided period drama miniseries spoof.

Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt: Season One (Universal, DVD: 2 discs, \$22.98). The cheerful survivor (Ellie Kemper) of an underground doomsday cult navigates life in New York City in this 2015 first season of the Netflix series, featuring guest appearances by Jon Hamm, Martin Short, and co-creator Tina Fey.

March 15

Cedar Cove: The Final Season (Hallmark, DVD: 3 discs, \$24.95). This 2015 third and final season of the Hallmark Channel's first original scripted series—based on novels by Debbie Macomber—stars Andie MacDowell as a judge.

CHiPs: The Complete Fourth Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$29.98). SoCal motorcycle police officers fight crime in this 1980-81 fourth season of the light drama series starring Erik Estrada and Larry Wilcox.

World War II Documentaries

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THROUGH RARE ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE AND
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OVERCOME ALL OF THESE ODDS AND PROVE THAT PERSISTENCE
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THAN SIX DECADES AFTER
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HE BUILT THE MIGHTIEST
ARMY IN HISTORY AND
SELECTED ITS LEADERS.
EISENHOWER, MACARTHUR
AND PATTON ALL OBEYED
HIS COMMANDS. AND,
WHEN VICTORY WAS WON, HE BOUND UP THE
WORLD'S WOUNDS WITH A PLAN FOR
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Game of Thrones: The Complete Fifth Season

(HBO, DVD: 5 discs, \$59.99; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$79.98). This highly-anticipated 2015 fifth season based on the best-selling fantasy series by George R.R. Martin stars Peter Dinklage, Kit Harington, and Emilia Clarke.



Mayday (Acorn, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99). Aired on BBC One, this five-part 2013 drama centering on an annual pagan parade stars Leila Mimmack, Peter Firth, Sophie Okonedo, and Aidan Gillen.

New Tricks: Season 12 (Acorn, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99). Tamzin Outhwaite, Denis Lawson, Nicholas Lyndhurst, and Larry Lamb star in this 2015 12th and final season of the BBC procedural dramedy following former police officers who tackle cold cases.

March 22

Lost Girl—The Final Chapters: Seasons Five & Six (Funimation, DVD: 6 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$34.98). Anna Silk stars as the titular bisexual succubus in this compilation from the 2014-15 final seasons of the Canadian supernatural drama that also stars Kris Holden-Ried and Ksenia Solo.

Maude: The Complete Fourth Season (Shout! Factory, DVD: 3 discs, \$26.99). Outspoken feminist Maude (Bea Arthur) runs for state senate in this 1975-76 fourth season of the Norman Lear sitcom, featuring guest appearances by Bernadette Peters, Teri Garr, and Lyle Waggoner.

Midwinter of the Spirit (Acorn, DVD: \$34.99). Based on the novel by Phil Rickman, this 2015 three-episode ITV series following an exorcist country vicar (Anna Maxwell Martin) on a supernatural murder investigation also features David Threlfall and Nicholas Pinnock.

The Royals: Season Two

(Lionsgate, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98). The arrogant Cyrus (Jake Maskall) takes the throne after the king's death in this 2015-16 E! original drama series starring Elizabeth Hurley, William Moseley, and Alexandra Park.



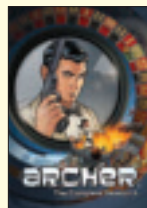
TURN: Washington's Spies—The Complete Second Season (Anchor Bay, DVD: 3 discs, \$49.98). Set in 1777, this 2015 sopho-

more season of the fictionalized period drama stars Jamie Bell, Heather Lind, Seth Numrich, and Angus Macfadyen.

March 29

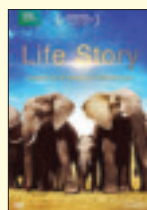
Archer: The Complete Season 6

(Fox, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.99). Super spy Sterling Archer (voiced by H. Jon Benjamin) is back in this 2015 sixth season of the FX-aired animated action series that includes guest voices by Christian Slater, C.C.H. Pounder, Keith David, and Carrie Brownstein.



Humans: Uncut U.K. Edition (Acorn, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.99). Aired stateside on AMC, this 2015 first season of the British-American sci-fi series following the impact of robot servants on society stars Gemma Chan, Tom Goodman-Hill, Pixie Davies, and Sope Dirisu.

Life Story (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$49.98). Sir David Attenborough narrates this 2014 six-part natural history series focusing on various animals at different stages of life.



Mystery Science Theatre 3000: XXXV (Shout! Factory, DVD: 4 discs, \$59.99). This latest compilation featuring film-blasting hosts Joel Hodgson and Mike Nelson and their robot friends Tom Servo and Crow includes three films by Roger Corman.

April 5

Banshee: The Complete Third Season

(HBO, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$49.99). Aired on Cinemax, this 2015 third season continues to follow an ex-convict turned sheriff (Antony Starr) and his former accomplice (Ivana Milicevic) as they navigate crime-lord dramas within the titular fictional Amish small town.

Casual: Season One (Lionsgate, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98). A divorcee and her teen daughter move in with the woman's bachelor brother in this 2015 debut season of the Hulu comedy series starring Michaela Watkins, Tara Lynne Barr, and Tommy Dewey.

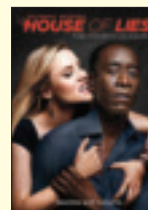
Episodes: The Fourth Season (Showtime, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98). Matt LeBlanc

plays an over-the-top version of himself in this 2015 fourth season of the Showtime-aired comedy series that finds the actor supplementing his career by working with a British writing couple (Tamsin Greig and Stephen Mangan).

The Expanse: Season One (Universal, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$49.98). Based on novels by James S. A. Corey, this 2015-16 first season of the sci-fi drama stars Thomas Jane, Steven Strait, Paulo Costanzo, and Shohreh Aghdashloo.

House of Lies: The Fourth Season

(Showtime, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98). Don Cheadle and Kristen Bell star in this 2015 fourth season of the Showtime series revolving around a dastardly management consulting firm.



NYPD Blue: Season 09 (Shout! Factory, DVD: 5 discs, \$34.99). The attacks of 9/11 come into play in this 2001-02 ninth season of the crime drama series, which adds Mark-Paul Gosselaar to the cast as the partner of hardboiled Detective Andy Sipowicz (Dennis Franz).

A Place to Call Home: Season 3 (Acorn, DVD: 3 discs, \$59.99). Set in Australia after WWII, this 2015 third season follows nurse Sarah Adams (Martan Dusseldorp), who becomes involved with an affluent family (including stars Noni Hazlehurst and Brett Climo).

April 12

Finding Your Roots: Season 3 (PBS, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99). Hosted by Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., this 2016 third season of the PBS-aired genealogical series explores the family trees of notables including Donna Brazile, Bill O'Reilly, Shonda Rhimes, Norman Lear, Sandra Cisneros, and Frank Gehry.

Heroes Reborn: Event Series

(Universal, DVD: 4 discs, \$44.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.98). This 2015-16 miniseries continuation of the earlier 2006-10 sci-fi series about humans with superpowers stars Jack Coleman, Zachary Levi, and Kiki Sukezane.



Prisoners' Wives: Complete Collection (Acorn, DVD: 4 discs, \$59.99). Showcasing

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DIRECTED BY SYLVIE VERHEYDE

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FILMS OF MAURICE PIALET - VOLUME 1

DIRECTED BY MAURICE PIALAT

STREET DATE: MAY 17, 2016 SRP: \$39.98 / \$49.98

For the first time in HD and with over 4 hours of bonus material, a collection of films by director Maurice Pialat, including the family drama **THE MOUTH AGAPE** with Nathalie Baye, the slice-of-life film about teenagers in suburban France **GRADUATE FIRST**, and **LOULOU**, a tale of tortured love.



A MARRIED WOMEN

DIRECTED BY JEAN-LUC GODARD

STREET DATE: MAY 24, 2016 SRP: \$29.98 / \$39.98

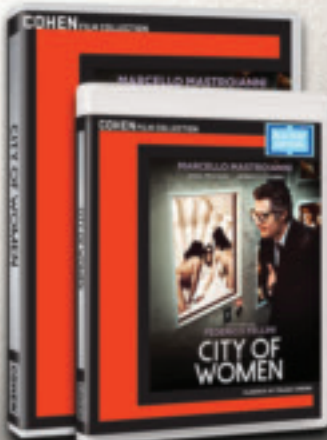
An often overlooked masterwork from Godard's most productive period. Charlotte (Macha Méril) is a young married woman having an affair with an actor. When she discovers that she is pregnant, she must decide which man is the father and which man she will stay with.

CITY OF WOMEN

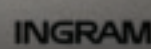
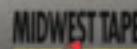
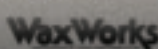
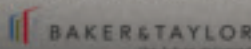
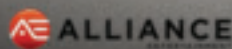
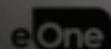
DIRECTED BY FEDERICO FELLINI

STREET DATE: MAY 31, 2016 SRP: \$29.98 / \$39.98

In a railway coach Snàporaz (Marcello Mastroianni) wakes from a nap and seduces a beautiful stranger. Fellini's surrealistic and over the top fantasy earned him four Silver Ribbons by the Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists.



Contact your Sales Representative:



the lives of women left behind by incarcerated men, this 2012-13 BBC drama stars Emma Rigby, Iain Glen, Polly Walker, and Pippa Haywood.

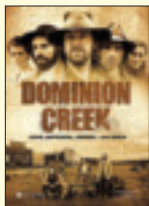
Sisters: Season Four (Shout! Factory, DVD: 6 discs, \$39.95). Illinois siblings (Swoosie Kurtz, Sela Ward, Patricia Kalember, and Julianne Phillips) experience highs and lows in the 1993-94 fourth season of this dramedy series that also features George Clooney as a detective love interest.

Welcome to Sweden: Season 2 (Entertainment One, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). This 2015 second and final season of the short-lived sitcom about a NYC accountant (Greg Kinnear) who adjusts to life in his girlfriend's home in Sweden features guest appearances by Neve Campbell, Jack Black, and Paul Simon.

April 19

And Then There Were None (Acorn, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99). Based on Agatha Christie's 1939 classic mystery novel, this three-part 2015 BBC One adaptation stars Douglas Booth, Miranda Richardson, Charles Dance, and Sam Neill.

Dominion Creek (Acorn, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99). Aired as *An Klondike* on TG4, this Irish series—seen on Netflix stateside—follows the three Connolly brothers (Dara Devaney, Owen McDonnell, and Seán T. Ó Meallaigh) as they settle in the Canadian Yukon during the gold rush.



Haven: The Final Season (Entertainment One, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.98). The titular small Maine town is cut off by a mysterious fog bank in this 2014-15 fifth and final season of the supernatural series based on Stephen King's *The Colorado Kid*, starring Emily Rose and Lucas Bryant.

Pretty Little Liars: The Complete Sixth Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$49.99). Five friends are trapped by a demented captor in this 2015-16 sixth season of the ABC Family series starring Troian Bellisario, Ashley Benson, Tyler Blackburn, and Lucy Hale.



Silicon Valley: The Complete Second Season (HBO, DVD: 2 discs, \$26.95; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$34.98). This 2015 sophomore season of the HBO-aired comedy series from creator Mike Judge follows a group of men with a Bay Area startup company.

Veep: The Complete Fourth Season (HBO, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). Julia Louis-Dreyfus stars in her Emmy-winning role as the U.S. Vice President in this 2015 fourth season of the HBO political satire series that also features Anna Chlumsky, Tony Hale, Timothy Simons, and Reid Scott.



April 26

19-2: Season 1 (Acorn, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99). The officers of the Montreal Police Service try to balance their professional and personal lives in this 2014 debut season of the English-language version of the Canadian drama series starring Jared Keeso, Adrian Holmes, and Benz Antoine.

The Doctor Blake Mysteries: Season One (BBC, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99). This 2013 first season of the Australian series following the titular chief medical officer's hometown return after three decades stars Craig McLachlan, Nadine Gardner, and Joel Tobeck.

Royal Pains: Season Seven (Universal, DVD: 2 discs, \$26.98). Hamptons resort doctor Hank Lawson (Mark Feuerstein) looks for love in this 2015 seventh season of the USA Network medical dramedy, which also features Paulo Costanzo, Reshma Shetty, and Henry Winkler.

Looking Ahead

Coming in May is the first season of **Lou Grant**, sophomore season of **The Brokenwood Mysteries**, the fourth seasons of **Major Crimes** and **Mr. Selfridge**, the fifth season of **The Facts of Life**, the 22nd season of **Top Gear**, the miniseries **The Last Panthers**, and the complete series of **Cop Rock**.



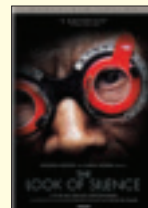
Re-priced or New to DVD/Blu-ray

Hate Crimes in the Heartland (Virgil, DVD: \$19.99). Directed by Rachel Lyon, this timely 2015 documentary (VL-7/15

★★★1/2) explores America's history of racial hatred through the lens of Tulsa, OK, where hates crimes from 1921 and 2012 continue to have an impact on the local community.

How to Eat Your Watermelon in White Company (And Enjoy It) (Music Box, DVD: \$19.95). Director Joe Angio's lively and provocatively titled 2006 documentary (VL-9/07 ★★★) showcases the life and career of keystone indie blaxploitation filmmaker Melvin Van Peebles. New bonus features include an interview with Van Peebles.

The Look of Silence (Drafthouse, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.95). Filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer's Oscar-nominated 2015 companion documentary (VL-7/15 ★★★) to his Oscar-nominated 2012 film *The Act of Killing* centers on optician Adi Rukun, who confronts the men who killed his brother during the anti-Communist purge in Indonesia in 1965. Bonus features include audio commentary with Oppenheimer and executive producer Errol Morris, a Q&A with executive producer Werner Herzog, and footage from the Indonesian premiere.



Paniolo O Hawai'i: Cowboys of the Far West (Dreamscape, DVD: \$29.99 [\$199.99 w/PPR], web: dreamscapeab.com). Narrated by Willie Nelson, this 1997 documentary explores the history of Hawaii's Paniolo cowboys, who learned from the great vaqueros of early California. Also newly available at the same price are two other documentaries on Hawaii: **The Hawaiians: Reflecting Spirit and Waikiki: In the Wake of Dreams**.

Touch the Wall (Touch the Wall, DVD: \$22, Blu-ray: \$25; Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$75 w/PPR; high schools & public libraries; \$350 w/PPR; colleges & universities, web: touchthewall.com). Featuring striking underwater photography, lighthearted animation, and exciting swim meet footage, filmmakers Christo Brock and Grant A. Barbeito's 2015 documentary (VL-1/16 ★★★1/2) follows two competitive swimmers in the run-up to the 2012 Summer Olympics.



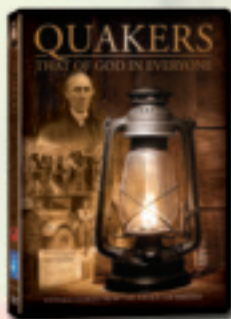
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Quakers

Led by what they refer to as their "inner light," members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) played pivotal roles in some of the most transformative events of the last four centuries. Whether it be forging relations with Native Americans, the abolition of slavery, World War II, or the Civil Rights Movement, Quakers resolutely followed conscience even when faced with fierce opposition. This documentary introduces you to untold stories of Friends who profoundly influenced the course of American history. Documentary, 90 minutes.

#501639D, \$19.99, UPC 7 27985 01639 9



Cody High: A Life Remodeled Project

Cody High focuses on the efforts of Detroit's impoverished Cody Rouge community to remove blight and create a safe environment for students at the local schools, including the hundreds of students who attend Cody High School. Residents and volunteers, in partnership with Life Remodeled, remodeled three schools and 25 homes and tore down 254 vacant houses, bringing beauty back to 303 blocks of Detroit. Documentary, 78 minutes.

#501675D, \$14.99, UPC 7 27985 01675 7



The Story of the Twelve Apostles (rerelease)

They started out as average, unexceptional men of their time: fishermen, farmers, local magistrates. But their dedication to a prophetic Jewish preacher in the backwaters of the Roman Empire transformed them into revolutionaries and, in the process, changed the world itself in ways that would reverberate across time for two thousand years. Here is the inspiring, astonishing story of the little-known men who became The Twelve Apostles. Documentary, 100 minutes.

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The Stranger

The Stranger is a 40-minute documentary film produced by Emmy-award winning producer Linda Midgett. It profiles three immigrant stories and includes interviews with local and national leaders. By highlighting compelling stories of immigrants and addressing some common economic and political misconceptions, *The Stranger* seeks to mobilize us to respond to immigrants and to immigration policy in ways that are consistent with moral principles. Documentary, 40 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, subtitled 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

All About E ★★

Wolfe, 93 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95

In this loopy dramedy, the titular "E" (Mandahla Rose) is a gifted clarinetist who gave up a possible musical career—as well as abandoning her family and one true love, Trish (Julia Billington)—to become a celebrity DJ in a hot British nightclub owned by the creepy, thuggish Johnny Rock (Simon Bolton). The latter runs E's life with an iron fist, and when her sweet, gay manager, Matt (Brett Rogers), books E into a competing club, Johnny crushes that plan with veiled threats. So it's no wonder that after E accidentally ends up with a bag of Johnny's cash receipts from her stints at his venue, she feels no guilt about keeping the money. Johnny, in a lethal mood, thinks otherwise, forcing E and Matt to go on the run, and they end up on Trish's farm. Here, relationship dramas unfold while Johnny continues to follow E's trail. Writer-director Louise Wadley has a deft hand with the occasional action sequence (especially a climactic scene involving a plane), and the performances are solid (particularly by Bolton and Rogers), but this oddball film—built on a lightweight, silly premise—takes itself a bit too seriously, and strains credulity. Optional. (T. Keogh)



Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip ★★

Fox, 90 min., PG, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, Mar. 15

Combining live-action with computer-animated characters, this is the fourth installment in the chirpy chipmunk series that began in 2007. As the plot unfolds, mischievous Alvin (voiced by Justin Long), chubby Theodore



(voiced by Jesse McCartney), and studious Simon (voiced by Matthew Gray Gubler) are worried that their beloved surrogate dad/manager, Dave Seville (Jason Lee), has become overly enamored with his ER doctor girlfriend, Samantha (Kimberly Williams-Paisley). Terrified by the idea that Dave will abandon them, the furry friends reluctantly team up with Samantha's loathsome teenage son, Miles (Josh Green), to fly from Los Angeles to Miami, where they believe that Dave is about to propose. Problem is: en route, one of the chipmunks accidentally sets free all of the animals in the cargo hold. Obviously, the disruption of this airborne menagerie irks the federal air marshal, vengeful Agent Suggs (Tony Hale), who promptly threatens them with prison and puts them on the No Fly List. As directed by Walt Becker, this is a tediously silly franchise film, predictably filled with slapstick, along with the requisite bathroom humor. But there is one amusing scene for film buffs: treated disdainfully in First Class by subversive, idiosyncratic director John Waters, snippy Alvin retorts, "Don't judge me! I saw *Pink Flamingos*!" Optional, at best. (S. Granger)

Amorous ★1/2

Film Movement, 82 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95

In Joanna Coates's debut feature, four young people who are dissatisfied with their ordinary lives go off to one member's isolated inherited estate to fashion what they conceive as a mini-utopia. The quartet gambol about in the grass and take turns preparing skits to entertain each other during the evenings. They celebrate rituals, such as a somber mock funeral that is apparently designed to represent the death of their rejected, conventional histories. They also engage in sex, of course, and while two are male and two female, the permutations are various. The problem with the film (originally titled *Hide and Seek*) is that the four characters—Max (Josh O'Connor), Charlotte (Hannah Arterton), Jack (Daniel Metz), and Leah (Rea Mole)—are simply not very interesting. *Amorous* briefly comes to life twice: when a boyfriend of one of the girls unexpectedly shows up, only to be treated as an unwanted outsider, and when one of the couples pretends to have fallen in love in order to upset the others. Otherwise, watching these over-privileged, immature twentysomethings indulge in their meandering search for fulfillment is a chore and a bore (even with the graphic sexuality). Not recommended. (F. Swietek)



The Assassin ★★1/2

Well Go USA, 106 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

Chinese filmmaker Hou Hsiou-Hsien won the Best Director Award at Cannes for *The*

Assassin, a reimagining of the martial arts drama as a vision of stillness, tension, and painterly beauty. Asian superstar Shu Qi plays Nie Yinniang, kidnapped as a child and trained by a cold-blooded nun to become an assassin for the Emperor, while Chen Chang costars as Tian Ji'an, Nie's target. Tian also happens to be her cousin, as well as the man to whom she was once betrothed. Needless to say, all of this carries emotional complications, which Nie hides behind her expressionless facial mask but betrays in her actions. Hou doesn't shoot the martial arts scenes in a conventional manner: the action arrives in pulses—sudden bursts of movement—while the battle scenes are brief, with images of individuals racing through tall grass or running through the underbrush given as much weight as the clash of swordsmen (and swordswomen). Viewers looking for a classic martial arts spectacle in the vein of *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon* or *Ip Man* may find this frustrating, but many will appreciate this unique cinematic experience. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Assassination ★★1/2

Well Go USA, 139 min., in Korean w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

South Korea has become the center for slick action Asian cinema. *Assassination*, which is set during the Japanese occupation of Korea in the early 1930s, is an entertaining period piece that is more impressive for its action than its story. The film opens with a Korean government leader in exile (Lee Jung-jae) spearheading a jailbreak to free a female army sniper sharpshooter (Jun Ji-hyun), who is subsequently sent to kill a high-ranking Japanese officer. A pair of mercenary criminals are tasked with protecting her, and then another pair of hitmen are dispatched to stop the mission. Naturally, there's a traitor here, just one of many turnabouts in a film that is full of double-crosses, double agents, and a somewhat confusing timeline that jumps around with flashbacks and flashforwards. Serving up busy battles (including a brutal massacre) and handsome set-pieces, director Choi Dong-hoon displays more technical expertise than passion or storytelling flair. Still, this is often entertaining and was one of South Korea's top-grossing films for 2015. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)



The Ballad of the Weeping Spring

★★★

SISU, 105 min., in Hebrew w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95

Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* and its Hollywood remake *The Magnificent Seven* are

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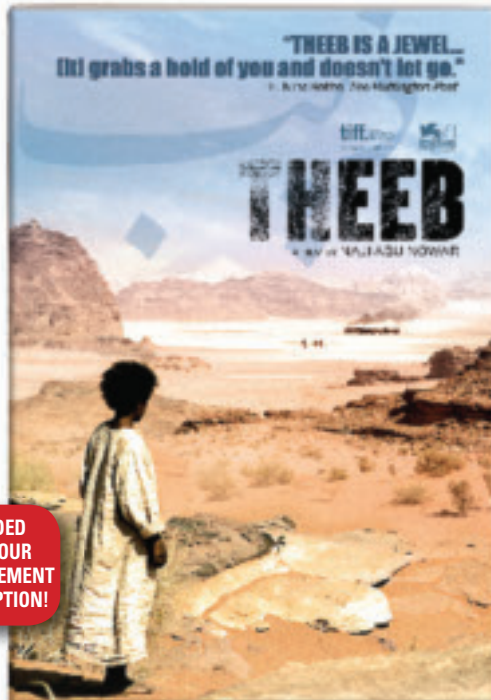
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the obvious inspirations for Benny Toraty's Israeli award-winner, only the tone here is genial—with Mizrahi musical instruments replacing Japanese swords or Wild West guns. The story begins with young Avram (Arnon Zadok) approaching Jossef (Uri Gavriel), a reclusive ex-con, with a plea that he take up his long-untouched tar—a Middle Eastern lute—and gather other musicians to come to the bedside of his dying father in order to perform the titular piece, which the two older men composed many years earlier but never played. Jossef agrees, and the film follows him and Avram as they assemble a band. Some are old friends of Jossef's, but others are newcomers—a talented young singer, a blind flautist—and the would-be recruiters must use considerable persuasion (and in some cases a bit of chicanery) to secure involvement when an angry wife or a local gang boss tries to get in the way. The enticements of the bars that they visit to search for talent can also prove to be a serious obstacle. Naturally, all the effort turns out to be worth it. *The Ballad of the Weeping Spring* succeeds as a good-natured homage to Kurosawa and John Sturges, but is also a lively tribute to the Mizrahi genre of music, which originated in the Jewish communities in Arab and Persian lands to the east of Israel and continues to be played by immigrants. Recommended. (F. Swietek)



Blind ★★½

KimStim, 96 min., in Norwegian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99

Haunting and enigmatic, *Blind* is a blur of reality and fantasy revolving around a woman who recently lost her eyesight and now refuses to leave her apartment. In this debut feature by Norwegian director Eskil Vogt, Ingrid (Ellen Dorrit Pettersen), a retired schoolteacher, spends her days sitting alone by a window, seemingly awaiting the return from work of her architect husband, Morten (Henrik Rafaelsen). The viewer gets glimpses of Ingrid's restless imagination during scenes in which Morten appears to have slipped into their home unnoticed and is clandestinely watching her—actions that prove to be projections of Ingrid's own strange blend of paranoia and delight. Other clues surface that Ingrid has become a combined voyeur and provocateur in her mind's eye, taking on a storyteller role that gives her an illusory sense of God-like authority over a fictional world. None of this is apparent at first, but eventually certain events, such as the sudden switching of a child's gender, suggests that much of what is being seen is subject to Ingrid's whims. That also goes for the film's other major characters, including a divorced mom who might be

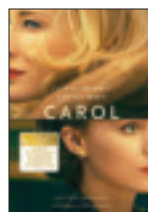


having an affair with Morten, and an old friend of Morten's who is a socially isolated Peeping Tom. Vogt skillfully weaves all of this together into a growing mystery about different types of "seeing" in this challenging film, which does contain brief explicit images of downloaded pornographic content. Highly recommended for more adventurous collections. (T. Keogh)

Carol ★★★

Anchor Bay, 118 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.99, Mar. 15

Todd Haynes's tasteful yet sometimes tedious adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's 1952 novel, *The Price of Salt* (published under the pseudonym Claire Morgan because Highsmith's mother disapproved of her daughter's romantic preference for women) stars Oscar nominee Cate Blanchett as Carol Aird, a wealthy about-to-be-divorcee who meets salesgirl Therese Belivet (Oscar nominee Rooney Mara) while shopping for a Christmas gift for her young daughter. Carol leaves her expensive leather gloves on the counter, and after Therese mails them back, Carol invites her to visit her elegant New Jersey home. They eye each other longingly, but this is the 1950s, so they maintain a modest demeanor. Impulsively, Carol asks aspiring photographer Therese to accompany her on a cross-country trip. Clad in a mink coat, glamorous, gold-haired Carol is exquisite, while insipid, indecisive Therese is simply infatuated. Eventually, the pair acknowledge their physical attraction. Unfortunately, they exhibit neither sexual chemistry nor emotional rapport—no playfulness, no humor, only angst and guilt. Indeed, languid Carol seems to relate far better to her ex-lover (Sarah Paulson), who remains her best friend/confidante, coming to her aid when the going gets rough. Haynes's slow-paced, fetishistic, formalized direction is stylishly restrained, making for rather tepid melodrama. Curiously, the most sensitive and affecting scene is not between the two women, but rather when Carol finally confronts her bitter, bewildered husband (Kyle Chandler)—begging him to put their daughter's welfare above his vindictiveness in their ongoing custody battle. Still, given the Oscar attention, this is recommended. (S. Granger)



Chi-Raq ★★★

Lionsgate, 127 min., R, DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$24.99

Spike Lee adapts Aristophanes's ancient Greek play *Lysistrata* in this passionate, provocative, and unconventional film that transposes the story to Chicago's South Side, which earned the name Chi-Raq for its high murder rate. Teyonah Parris takes the role of



Lysistrata, a tough, sexually unapologetic woman who—after seeing a child killed in a drive-by shooting—organizes the women of gang members on both sides of the war to stage a sex strike until they end the killing. Nick Cannon costars as rapper and gang leader Chi-Raq, who glorifies the violence in his music. Lee returns to the stylistic experimentation and cinematic confrontation of his earlier films, with jarring shifts in tone and temperament as he stridently proclaims the film's message throughout—at times like a revival meeting seeking a callback, at others presenting a history lesson in verse. The anti-violence message here is serious even if the vehicle is colorful and satirical, playing out as a musical production in one scene and a literal battle of the sexes in another. The fine cast includes Angela Bassett as an elder offering advice to Lysistrata, Wesley Snipes as a one-eyed rival gang leader named Cyclops, Jennifer Hudson as a mother mourning a dead child, John Cusack as an activist priest calling out "politicians in the pocket of the NRA," and Samuel L. Jackson as the chorus and commentator. Provocative, sexy, and challenging, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

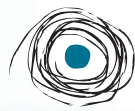
The Clearstream Affair

★★½

First Run, 102 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95

In Vincent Garenq's fact-based thriller, the career and happy home life of a French investigative journalist are nearly destroyed by his obsession to uncover the truth about international financial malfeasance that reaches into the upper echelons of government. Gilles Lellouche stars as Denis Robert, a reporter whose stories about political corruption lead him to a Luxembourg-based bank called Clearstream, which he learns has prospered from setting up secret accounts that allow customers to shield themselves from taxation and launder ill-gotten profits—sometimes using the proceeds in political campaigns. Simultaneously, a magistrate (Charles Berling) charged with looking into kickbacks in the French arms industry also discovers evidence of Clearstream's involvement. Eventually, the two men join forces, but their efforts are undercut by an iffy informant, and Robert finds himself the target of libel lawsuits brought by Clearstream. Garenq is obviously committed to an accurate telling of this story, which unfortunately brings in so many characters and narrative threads that it is difficult to keep them straight. Still, not least because it reveals a little-known facet of the global financial chicanery that caused the economic crisis of 2008, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)





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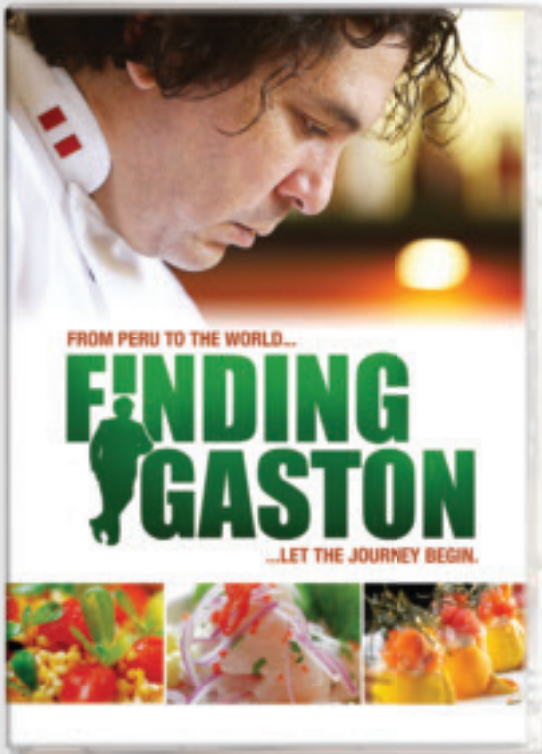
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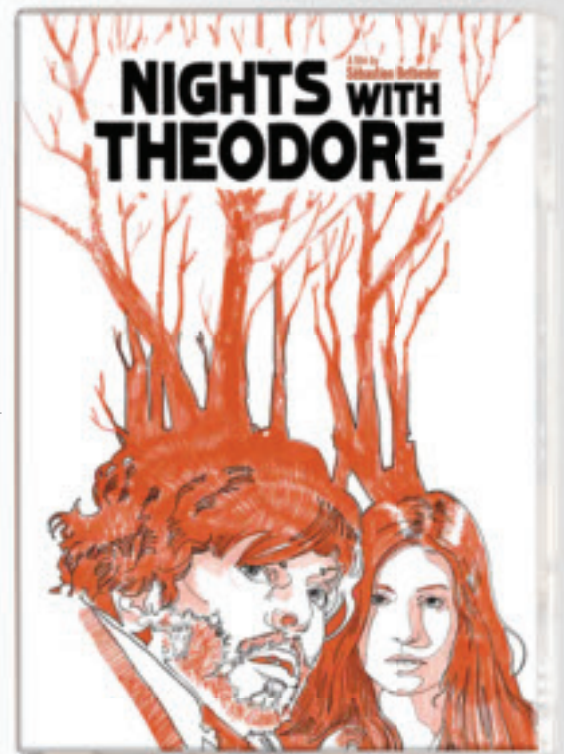
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Creed ★★½

Warner, 133 min., PG-13,
DVD: \$28.98, Blu-ray/DVD
Combo: \$35.99, Mar. 1



Writer-director Ryan Coogler not only revives Rocky nostalgia here but also introduces a new character: Adonis "Donnie" Johnson (Michael B. Jordan), son of legendary boxing champion Apollo Creed. Born out of wedlock to a mother who died, Donnie is shuffled through foster care and juvenile detention until being adopted as an adolescent by Mary Anne Creed (Phylicia Rashad), who knows that Donnie is her late husband's illegitimate son. Raised and educated in L.A.'s posh Baldwin Hills, Donnie lands a cushy corporate job but spends weekends prizefighting in Tijuana, eventually tracking down his father's fabled nemesis/friend, Rocky Balboa (Oscar nominee Sylvester Stallone) in Philadelphia. Rocky is reluctant to help at first but soon relents, patiently teaching and training Donnie. Donnie is determined to use his own name, but that turns off ambitious promoters. "Every move that I make, every punch that I throw, everybody's gonna compare me to him," he admits. Meanwhile, Donnie hooks up with Bianca (Tessa Thompson), a singer/songwriter, as the plot shuttles toward a major match with Britain's cocky Ricky Conlan (ABA former heavyweight champion Tony Bellew). What stands out here are the skillfully subtle storytelling choices as *Creed* delves into the lengths a man will go to in order to connect with a father he never knew. A very satisfying, redemptive crowd-pleaser, this is highly recommended. (S. Granger)

The Cut ★★½

Strand, 138 min., in Armenian,
Arabic & English w/English
subtitles, not rated, DVD:
\$29.99

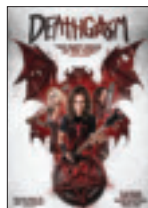


Fatih Akin, a German-born filmmaker of Turkish descent, makes films about outsiders and the disenfranchised. *The Cut* takes viewers back 100 years to the Ottoman Empire (in an area that is now Turkey) to chronicle the odyssey of Nazareth Manoogian (Tahar Rahim), an Armenian Christian torn from his family by the Turks during World War I. Nazareth survives the Armenian genocide (an historical event still officially denied in Turkey) and treks halfway across the world to try to find his daughters. Nazareth's journey spans almost a decade, as he traverses thousands of miles (through Lebanon, Cuba, Florida, and the plains of the American Midwest), and deals with people speaking multiple languages, although he himself was left speechless from a throat wound (the cut of the film's title). Nazareth observes and endures inhuman acts of cruelty, but is also the beneficiary of the kindness and generosity from strangers along

the way. Akin wrote the script with Mardik Martin, an Iraqi-born American of Armenian descent who co-wrote *Mean Streets* and *Raging Bull* with Martin Scorsese. Powerful and devastating, *The Cut* is a richly realized film with complicated characters and beautiful desolate landscapes shot on location in Europe, Africa, Cuba, and North America (Alberta substitutes for the United States). Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Deathgasm ★★

Dark Sky, 86 min., not rated,
DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98



You kind of know going in that a movie titled *Deathgasm* is unlikely to be deeply cerebral—unless we're talking about heads rolling, which they do in this New Zealand gorefest that adds heavy metal music and juvenile humor to a mix that aims for a campy midnight movie vibe it never quite achieves. The plot centers on goth teen Brodie (Milo Cawthorne), who is shipped off to live with his ultraconservative aunt (Jodie Rimmer) and uncle (Colin Moy) and their bullying jock son (Nick Hoskins-Smith) after Brodie's mother goes bonkers. Fortunately, Brodie meets hip guy Zakk (James Blake), who joins Brodie's metalhead band. When the pair break into a derelict house, they find crazy Daggers (Stephen Ure), once the lead singer of a legendary metal group, who is hiding out from the guru of a satanic cult intent on retrieving a "Dark Hymn" that Daggers stole and now bequeaths to our heroes. The story kicks into gear once the band plays the piece—which turns everybody within earshot into zombie-like monsters. Brodie and his cohorts struggle to fight off the menace, while the cult leader and his minions show up to reclaim the hymn, with much comically bloody mayhem ensuing. Writer-director Jason Lei Howden assembles the basic ingredients for a goofy good time, but doesn't quite successfully blend the elements, with only an occasional sharp line delivered here by a largely amateur cast. Optional, at best. (F. Swietek)

The Diary of a Teenage Girl ★★½

Sony, 102 min., R, DVD:
\$30.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99



In narrative terms, *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* has an afterschool special vibe as it unspools a story about an impressionable 15-year-old girl who indulges in sex with a much older man when a permissive, dysfunctional family life offers her no guidance. But filmmaker Marielle Heller's treatment of Phoebe Gloeckner's semi-autobiographical graphic novel refuses to mute the story's raw quality or paint the characters in bland, simplistic tones. It also

features a career-making performance by Bel Powley as Minnie, a precocious, articulate, artistically-inclined teen in 1970s San Francisco, whose mother Charlotte (Kristen Wiig) is very much a child of the time, embracing a freewheeling lifestyle rife with drugs and booze that leaves little time for bringing up her daughters. The only other regular adult presence is Charlotte's current boyfriend, Monroe (Alexander Skarsgård), a handsome laidback guy whose bemused mellowness offers an oasis of stability in the fraught household. Minnie and Monroe's eventual relationship is presented in gritty, realistic terms without being sensational, treating intimate sequences with sensitivity and animation that is delivered in a semi-psychedelic style derived from Minnie's own artistic efforts. The result is a cautionary tale with bite—a provocative, edgy portrayal of teen sexuality that is often hard to watch but even harder to forget. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

The Dinner ★★★

Film Movement, 92 min., in
Italian w/English subtitles, not
rated, DVD: \$24.95



Based on the bestselling 2009 novel by Dutch writer Herman Koch, Ivano De Matteo's foreboding domestic drama centers on two upscale families compromised by their respective offsprings' misdeeds. Massimo (Alessandro Gassman) is an affluent criminal-defense lawyer with a chic trophy wife. His ethics are questioned by brother Paolo (Luigi Lo Cascio), a dedicated, humanitarian doctor at a big-city hospital who has to patch together a child shot by one of Massimo's clients. And then Paolo and his tour-guide wife Clara (Giovanna Mezzogiorno) come to suspect that their own sullen teen son, a fan of violent Internet videos, may have committed a shocking street crime in the company of Massimo's stepdaughter. Which parents will go farther and be more ruthless in trying to cover up the truth? Word that a Cate Blanchett version is in the works for English-speaking audiences could draw added interest for this solid drama. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Disaster Playground

★★★½

Kino Lorber, 65 min., not rated,
DVD: \$24.95



This eye-opening, weirdly entertaining documentary offers a vast overview of the complex network of national and international agencies involved in dealing with asteroids and meteors that are plummeting toward Earth. Quirky filmmaker Nelly Ben Hayoun engages an army of scientists and policymakers at all levels of astro-science and world government to



"I am Johnna Janis and Invisible Scars is based on my life as a survivor of child sexual abuse. Many years ago someone shared their personal story of abuse, and urged me to begin focusing on healing from my past. This gave me the strength and courage to begin my own healing journey."

-Johnna Janis, Filmmaker

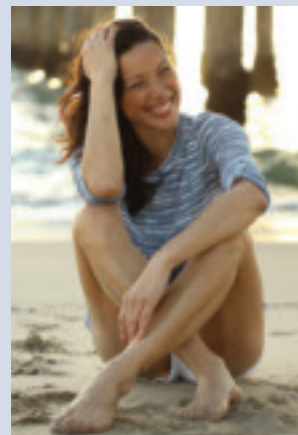
INVISIBLE SCARS

86 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 916905D

STREET DATE: MARCH 29

Statistics show that sexual abuse of children is rampant in our society: one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused by the age of 18. There are around 40 million adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA); the odds are, we all know someone who was targeted. CSA causes fear, shame, and an anxiety that promotes silence, and predators rely on that silence to remain undetected.

Invisible Scars tells the story of Johnna Janis, who reveals the abuse she suffered as a child, and, armed with a new self-awareness, explores the tools and resources available to help victims like her overcome the debilitating effects of CSA.



40 LOVE

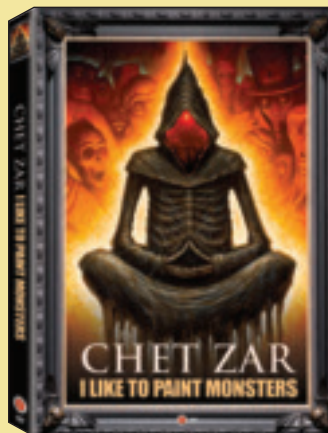
95 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 916882D

STREET DATE: MARCH 8

Pushed out of his executive-level job, Jérôme is determined to start his own company. His son Ugo, though only 11, shows great promise as a future tennis pro, and applies to the national training center at Roland-Garros. Together, they begin to realize that not all rules can be bent in trying to realize their dreams.

"An intriguing family sports drama. The way the filmmakers find parallels between a father falling from grace, and a son rising toward it, is captivating."

-The Hollywood Reporter



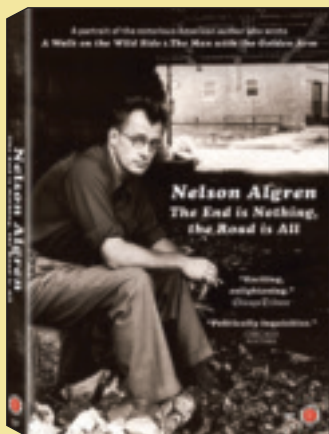
CHET ZAR: I LIKE TO PAINT MONSTERS

80 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 916875D

STREET DATE: MARCH 8

Enter the dark and foreboding world of Chet Zar, where apocalyptic industrial landscapes are inhabited by disturbing yet beautiful monstrosities. Sometimes gruesome, occasionally funny, but always thought-provoking, Zar's art is as enigmatic as it is frightening. But who is Chet Zar?

"Chet Zar's extraordinary paintings deliver us down into a world of the purest mystery and dread. I Like to Paint Monsters is an inspiring and important film about the artist, as well as art itself." -Clive Barker



NELSON ALGREN: THE END IS NOTHING, THE ROAD IS ALL

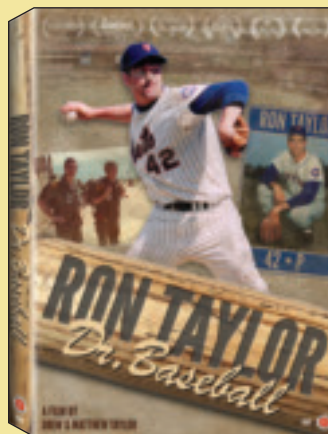
85 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 916868D

STREET DATE: MARCH 8

Featuring Kurt Vonnegut, Studs Terkel, Paul Buhle and others, this in-depth portrait of the notorious American author Nelson Algren interweaves rare archival footage with the gritty voice of Algren himself to capture the elusive and unique literary figure whose fame was cemented with the success of *The Man with the Golden Arm* and *A Walk on the Wild Side*.

"Exciting, enlightening." -Chicago Tribune

"Politically inquisitive." -Chicago Sun-Times



RON TAYLOR: DR. BASEBALL

20 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 916929D

STREET DATE: MARCH 29

The story of a Major League pitcher, who after winning two world championships (with the '64 Cardinals and the '69 Mets) embarked on a USO tour through Vietnam that would change his life. Directed by his two sons, the film features interviews with Hall of Famers and All-Stars including Joe Torre, Bob Gibson, Lou Brock, Joe Carter, Tim Lincecum and Cito Gaston. Historical MLB footage shows Ron in both World Series, pitching against the likes of Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris.



STRANGE & FAMILIAR ARCHITECTURE ON FOGO ISLAND

54 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 916912D

STREET DATE: MARCH 29

Off the coast of Newfoundland, a small island faces a collapsing fishing industry and economic decline. But when a local entrepreneur teams up with renowned architect Todd Saunders to build a one-of-a-kind hotel on a rugged, windswept coastline, they end up creating a strikingly original design that will become a catalyst for change.

"Examines how architecture acknowledges the cultural traditions which inspire it, while maintaining a captivating sense of the unfamiliar." -Architecture Daily



WELCOME TO LEITH

86 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 916837D

NOW AVAILABLE

This acclaimed documentary chronicles the attempted takeover of a small town in North Dakota by white supremacist Craig Cobb. As Cobb's behavior becomes more threatening, tensions soar, and the townspeople desperately look for ways to expel their unwanted neighbor.

With incredible access to both longtime residents of Leith and white supremacists, the film is a "gripping you-are-there portrait of a community under siege against an extremist vision, as engrossing as a fictional thriller." (Variety)

explore the complex process of identifying cosmic threats to our planet. But Hayoun doesn't conduct straightforward interviews; she puts key figures off-guard by having them act out imaginary scenes using ridiculous props, or showing viewers what it might be like to be awakened from slumber by an urgent phone call about a falling body. Hayoun also vigorously asserts herself in the film by playing characters, including a government spokeswoman whose performance is critiqued by officials. Despite the nutty streak, however, *Disaster Playgrounds* offers a fascinating look at the many elements involved in tracking asteroids, which include mini-observatories planted at high altitudes for the specific purpose of spotting anything headed our way; offices at NASA; and planning groups at the White House and United Nations. And this isn't strictly about science: there's a chilling discussion here concerning the difficult decisions world leaders would face if an asteroid could be deflected to hit a deemed-less-than-vital part of Earth. Highly recommended. (T. Keogh)

Divide in Concord

★★★

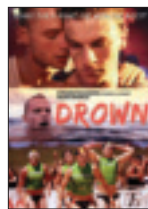
First Run, 82 min., not rated,
DVD: \$24.95



This interesting documentary tells the story of 84-year-old widow Jean Hill's seemingly quixotic effort to strike a blow for environmentalism, as she faces deep resistance in a town that prides itself on independence. Concord, MA—where the war for American independence began—celebrates its place in history with Revolutionary War re-enactments and annual parades. Many Concord residents don't want to be told what to do, clinging to a rationale that personal liberty trumps all other concerns, including damaging the oceans and contributing to pollution. After learning from her grandson about the destructive impact of plastic bottles that end up in Earth's oceans by the millions, Hill makes it her personal mission to ban plastic water bottles in Concord. The pushback is tremendous and comes from various sources, including the phenomenally profitable bottled water industry; local merchants; and anti-regulation types who cleverly frame Hill's movement as a war on drinking water instead of on the bottles. Year after year, Hill and her supporters work to get their measure passed, only to fail. But the margin shrinks each time, proving that the message is getting through. Filmmaker Kris Kaczor does a thorough job of capturing the politics of Hill's quest, treating all sides respectfully and fairly, while also serving up an affecting portrait of a quiet grandmother who discovers her life's work in her winter years. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Drown ★1/2

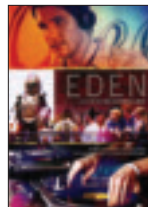
Strand, 97 min., not rated,
DVD: \$27.99



An unpleasant drama that suffers from a garbled narrative flow, *Drown* is a character study set against ominous events that threaten to break into cruel violence at any moment. Juggling slices of past and present scenes, filmmaker Dean Francis (adapting a stage play by Stephen Davis) creates a mosaic portrait of Len (Matt Levett), a lifeguard whose consistent good work earns him an annual award, an honor that he eagerly laps up given his barely sublimated self-loathing and rage. Bullied by his father for being gay, and generally hopeless about his options in life, Len has abused weaker gay teens and tried to hide his sexual orientation, even from himself. Along comes Phil (Jack Matthews), a confident and more carefree gay lifeguard who appears to have none of the problems that bedevil Len, resulting in an uneasy relationship that explodes when Phil wins the award that Len has taken home for years. Drunk and helpless on a beach at night, Phil will be subjected to various torments inflicted by Len and his sidekick (Harry Cook). Unfortunately, the jagged, non-sequential storytelling here only undercuts the strength of the material, dampening the intended impact. Not recommended. (T. Keogh)

Eden ★★

Broad Green, 131 min., in
French w/English subtitles, R,
DVD: \$26.99



There are moments when we all wonder how it was that time and tide washed us onto the shore of the lives we're currently living. An interesting if also sometimes taxing French drama, *Eden* tries to capture that drift of experience over 20-plus years in the lives of several techno-music DJs, who ride a wave of enthusiasm for electronic rave sounds in Parisian clubs. Inevitably, of course, that wave flattens, as do the characters' fortunes. Director Mia Hansen-Løve largely focuses on Paul (Félix de Givry), whom viewers first meet as an optimistic kid in 1992. Paul is captivated by dance music that he can create through sampling and manipulating ever-shifting beats. As the years pass, Paul partners with Stan (Hugo Conzelmann) to form a DJ duo. The two prove to be a hit and briefly become a sensation in New York. Along the way, there are drugs, tragedies, changing trends, and romances that sizzle and fizzle (Greta Gerwig brings a whimsical, ethereal presence to her role as the true love that Paul lets slip away). By the early 2000s, there is a sense that these declining champions have fallen into the trap of constant, desperate reinvention. Unfortunately, while *Eden* tries to be philosophic, much of

the film is shapeless—a blurry succession of club scenes and relationship disasters. Not a necessary purchase. (T. Keogh)

Emptying the Skies

★★★1/2

Music Box, 78 min., not rated,
DVD: \$29.95



Bestselling author Jonathan Franzen says here that he has avoided environmentalism because he was afraid of turning into a "misanthropist." But when he became transfixed by wild birds, he could not help himself, especially when assigned to write about uncontrolled poaching of vanishing songbirds in southern Europe. Migrating birds, already suffering habitat loss, are caught by the millions and sold on the black market as elitist gourmet delicacies. Although laws against the practice exist in the European Union, practically nobody (except grassroots activists) is actively combating the cruel glue-like traps, selfish landowners, thug peasants, and mafiosi in Cyprus, Italy, France, and other hotspots. Filmmaker Douglas Kass rides along with the dedicated young men of a tiny Committee Against Bird Slaughter, as they try to sabotage traps and liberate birds—or, just as often, have to euthanize mutilated, hopelessly crippled victims. Scenes of dead, dismembered, or suffering fowl are disturbing—and rightfully so—in this film that reminds us that behind the quaint charm of the Old World lie some unspeakably cruel customs and traditions. Highly recommended. (C. Cassidy)

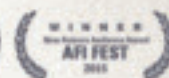
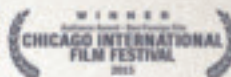
Far From Men ★★★

Kino Lorber, 101 min., in
French, Arabic, and Spanish
w/English subtitles, not rated,
DVD: \$29.95



Set in Algeria, circa 1954, against a backdrop of guerrilla war waged by Muslims against French colonials, David Oelhoffen's adaptation/enlargement of Albert Camus's "The Guest" manages to stretch a short story to feature length. At a time when insurgents are indiscriminately picking off French citizens, rural French schoolteacher Daru (Viggo Mortensen, who co-produced this film for iconic French studio Pathé) is assigned by the local militia with the task of taking a young Arab named Mohamed (Reda Kateb)—accused of murdering a cousin—to his trial and sentencing in the nearest sizable city. Daru wants no part of it and tries to set the stranger free. But Mohamed is determined to go through with his ordeal under French authorities, rather than face the rougher justice of his countrymen. Their reluctant journey together—shown in long, meaningful takes filmed in a harsh, foreboding landscape—reveals hidden truths in the pasts of both men and muddles the status of

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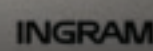
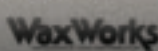
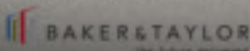
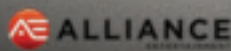
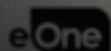
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captor and captive. A powerful, beautifully filmed, thought-provoking drama, this is recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Full of Grace ★★★

Cinedigm, 83 min., not rated, DVD: \$14.95



Although solemn (sometimes to the point of tonal monotony), *Full of Grace* serves up an interesting and moving story about a critical moment in the early Christian church, centering on the role that Jesus's mother played in reminding the apostles of her son's legacy. A decade following the death and resurrection of Christ, Mary (Bahia Haifi) spends her final days resting and recalling the pivotal event in her life, when she was called upon to bear God's only son. While she is being looked after by the young Zara (Kelsey Chow), the apostle Peter (Noam Jenkins) comes calling, burdened by the responsibility of salvaging and unifying the fledgling church in the face of rival Christian sects. Many of these factions, Peter reports, are like loose canons, sans legitimacy and even incorporating pagan practices. Yet Peter is unsure of direction: having spent years traveling and ministering while under constant peril, he is ambivalent about what to do. Mary helps him and the other apostles remember how their lives were changed through knowing Christ, and how her own life was defined by her son's mission, gruesome sacrifice, and conquering of death. Haifi and Jenkins both deliver powerful, emotionally rich performances in this faith-based character study by writer-director Andrew Hyatt. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

The Girl King ★★★

Wolfe, 102 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95



In 1933, Greta Garbo famously played Sweden's 17th-century Queen Christina as a monarch torn between duty and love. *The Girl King* serves up a more raucous version of the life of the reluctant royal. Groomed to run a kingdom during a protracted war between Lutherans and Catholics in Europe (Sweden was a Lutheran country), Kristina (Malin Buska)—rather than "Christina"—is a free-thinking progressive who is intent on turning Sweden into a jewel of intellectual and artistic ambition. But the queen is criticized in her own court as being too distracted and casual when it comes to essential responsibilities. Among these is her obligation to take a husband and give birth to an heir—which she steadfastly refuses to do. Equally stunning to her counselors is Kristina's agenda to create peaceful relations with the pope and Catholic Church.

Smitten with one of her ladies-in-waiting (Sarah Gadon), this queen indeed takes a lover, but not one that suits her longtime mentor (Michael Nyqvist). Patrick Bauchau costars as Kristina's favorite thinker, René Descartes. A handsome period biography, deftly directed by Mika Kaurismäki, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)

A Girl Like Her ★★★1/2

Cinedigm, 93 min., PG-13, DVD: \$19.95



A quasi-documentary approach is combined here with the found-footage formula to deliver a stern (often hectoring) warning against bullying in Amy S. Weber's sincere but heavy-handed tale about a high-school girl goaded into attempting suicide by a classmate who was once her friend. Most of *A Girl Like Her* is a faux documentary being made by Amy Gallagher (Weber, who generally confines herself to off-screen questions) about a highly regarded public high school. During filming, Amy learns that one of the students, Jessica (Lexi Ainsworth), has attempted suicide, and she changes the focus of her film to find out why, discovering that Jessica was harassed by her former friend Avery (Hunter King), a stereotypical mean girl who used direct intimidation and social network attacks to humiliate and threaten Jessica. The extent of the emotional assault is made clear through Avery's spycam footage, and eventually Amy confronts Avery as Jessica's parents hold vigil in her hospital room. The film tries to get beyond a simple black-and-white depiction of the all-too-familiar terrain of kids hurting kids by investigating the reasons for Avery's actions, which center on her overbearing mother. Earnest and well-intentioned, the film is also unfortunately rather preachy and stylistically clumsy, although the subject matter is important. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief

★★★1/2

FilmRise, 120 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95



Based on Lawrence Wright's titular 2013 book, Alex Gibney's high-profile HBO-aired exposé excoriates the "religion" of Scientology, which was founded by prolific pulp/sci-fi writer L. Ron Hubbard. With worldwide real-estate holdings built on fortunes bilked from adherents, Scientology is here charged with the ability and propensity to bully anyone who dares leave its tightly controlled membership (stated to be declining). Hubbard is slammed as a pretend war hero and virtual psychopath who established the cult as a strictly money-earning venture,

erected on a B-grade mythology about space emperors and lost souls that was hastily grafted onto Hubbard's gobbledygook-filled 1950 self-help tome *Dianetics*. Hubbard was dead by the time Scientology finally (and rather amazingly) bulldozed the IRS into granting it tax-exempt status in 1993. David Miscavige, Hubbard's successor, is portrayed as gangster-level sinister, going to extremes to keep celeb Scientologists such as John Travolta and Tom Cruise happy in the church. No voices defending Scientology are heard, making this a rather one-sided takedown. Still, testimony by ex-Scientologists and escapees, including filmmaker Paul Haggis and former elite member Hana Eltringham Whitfield, effectively condemn the sect, as do the cult's own hysterically kitschy, internally produced promo videos and media. Highly recommended. (C. Cassidy)

The Good Dinosaur

★★★

Walt Disney, 94 min., PG, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99



A near apocalypse occurred 65 million years ago when an asteroid almost hit Earth. Almost is the key word here, since dinosaurs *didn't* go extinct. Somewhere in the prehistoric American West, beneath the Clawtooth Mountains, there's a homesteading family of long-necked green Apatosaurus, headed by Poppa (voiced by Jeffrey Wright) and Momma (Frances McDormand). When a flashflood decimates their frontier farm, timid young Arlo (Raymond Ochoa)—who is not big and strong like his parents and siblings—is left on his own. Having been told that he must learn self-sacrifice and courage, frightened Arlo befriends a grunting, barking, howling feral boy whom he names Spot. Journeying together through the wilderness—dodging nasty raptors and a hungry gang of pterodactyls controlled by villainous Thunderclap (Steve Zahn)—the pair encounter a strange variety of exotic animal species, including a pink cobra with legs, a boarsized winged insect, and a pet-collecting Styracosaurus (Peter Sohn, who also directs) who is an expert in camouflage. Eventually, after sampling some hallucinogenic fruits, Arlo and Spot gather around a campfire with friendly, buffalo-ranching T-Rexes, whose cowboy leader, Butch (the distinctively gruff voice of Sam Elliott), talks about how fear must be neither surrendered to nor ignored. While Pixar's 16th animated feature can't be called either original or classic—borrowing elements from *The Lion King* and *The Jungle Book*—it is an amusing, anthropomorphic survivor story featuring awesomely photorealistic landscapes that are filled with raging rivers and fluttering fireflies. Recommended. (S. Granger)

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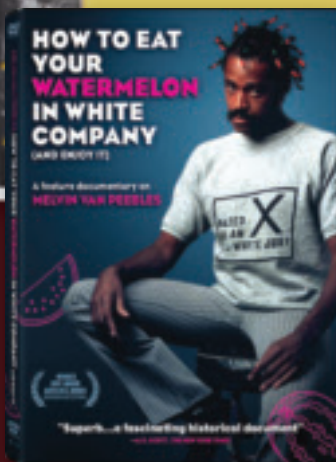
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Goosebumps ★★★

Sony, 103 min., PG, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$38.99



Based on the popular YA horror fiction series by R.L. Stine (who has sold more than 400 million books worldwide), *Goosebumps* centers on teenager Zach Cooper (Dylan Minnette), who is unhappy about moving from New York to the small town of Madison, DE, where his recently widowed mom (Amy Ryan) takes a job as school vice-principal. But Zach's angst is relieved when he meets girl-next-door Hannah (Odeya Rush), whose overprotective dad (warning Zach to stay away) turns out to be reclusive author R.L. Stine (Jack Black). Apparently, the monsters Stine created in his mysteries are real, which is why he zealously keeps them locked up. But when Zach unintentionally releases the creatures, they terrorize the town. So it's up to Zach, his nerdy pal Champ (Ryan Lee), Hannah, and Stine to return them to the books where they belong. Children who have enjoyed Stine's novels will recognize creatures like Abominable Snowman of Pasadena, Praying Mantis, Werewolf of Fever Swamp, The Blob, Vampire Poodle, the evil ventriloquist's dummy Slappy (voiced by Black), and a demonic gang of garden gnomes. Directed by Rob Letterman, *Goosebumps* combines many tales into an entertaining if often frantic stew. Black shines as the prolific writer who has churned out 204 YA novels going back to 1992, while Jillian Bell gets laughs as Zach's wacky Aunt Lorraine. Silly and spooky, this engaging family-friendly hit is recommended. (S. Granger)

Grandma ★★★

Sony, 79 min., R, DVD: \$26.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99



Paul Weitz's insightful and idiosyncratic road movie revolves around Elle Reid (Lily Tomlin), a peppery poet and semi-retired academic who is still grieving for Violet, her partner for 30 years. Elle's day begins as she coldly dismisses much-younger Olivia (Judy Greer), with whom she's had a four-month fling. And then Elle's 18-year-old granddaughter, Sage (Julia Garner), appears on her doorstep, asking for \$600 to pay for an abortion scheduled for later that afternoon. Having just paid her bills, Elle is broke. And she cannot use her credit cards since she cut them up to make a wind chime, wryly explaining, "I'm transmogrifying my life into art." Since going to Sage's brusque, judgmental businesswoman mother (Marcia Gay Harden) is out of the question, the pair climb into Violet's '55 Dodge Royal Lancer and begin driving around Los Angeles, trying to scrounge up the necessary cash. First stop is an attempt to shakedown the weasel

(Nat Wolff) who got Sage pregnant. Next, Elle tries to sell her feminist first editions to a bookstore/cafe owner (Elizabeth Peña), and retrieve a loan from a transgender tattoo artist (Laverne Cox). Most memorable among the people they visit is Karl (Sam Elliott), who has never forgotten (or forgiven) Elle. Written and directed by Paul Weitz, *Grandma* serves up a quirky character study within the wrapper of an acerbic dramedy that is perfectly tailored for Tomlin's considerable talents. Recommended. (S. Granger)

Guidance ★★★

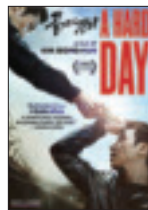
Strand, 80 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99



Writer-director Pat Mills—once a child actor on Canadian TV—also stars in this dark comedy as David Gold, a former kid actor now fallen on hard times. Gold is a desperately closeted gay man who uses alcohol and drugs to dull the pain of his ruined career. Just after being told that he has advanced melanoma, Gold loses his only remaining gig—recording "daily affirmations" of the sort that Al Franken's Stuart Smalley used to recite on *SNL*—and his landlady threatens to evict him. Gold decides to study YouTube clips of guidance counselors in order to pass himself off as one, and despite his odd manner he manages to secure a job at a high school, where he earns the respect of some students by not only dispensing distinctly unconventional advice but also sometimes a few shots from his always-at-hand bottle of vodka—to provide courage to shy kids (or score some pot from the campus dealer). Naturally, Gold can't get away with this charade forever—especially after the gay gym teacher shows a dangerous interest in him—and he eventually winds up on a Bonnie-and-Clyde robbery spree with a student from an unhappy home. *Guidance* is sometimes positively scabrous, but it also serves up subversive fun, and Gold is a perversely fascinating character, constantly repeating his affirmations in order to bolster his confidence in the face of disasters that threaten to engulf him. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

A Hard Day ★★★

Kino Lorber, 111 min., in Korean w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD or Blu-ray: \$29.95



This sly crime thriller from South Korean filmmaker Kim Seong-hun opens with a hit-and-run on a dark night. The life of the driver, hapless Gun-soo (Lee Sun-kyun), unravels from there as he tries to cover up the crime while also managing the funeral of his mother and ducking an internal affairs investigation. Yes, Gun-soo is a police detective on a corrupt

squad, who finds himself blackmailed by a nameless voice using the criminal tip line to make his threats. And that's just the first act. The body count rises, and the blackmailer turns out to be so evil and all-seeing that he threatens to become a comic book supervillain. The director resorts to every cinematic trick in the book to create the perfect nightmare scenario for the compromised anti-hero. Think of this as a Korean cop noir with a wicked sense of humor and an absurdly busy catalog of disasters, kind of like a Coen brothers film minus the eccentric personalities, driven at such a fast clip that you don't have time to catch your breath (or ponder the improbabilities of the twists). Ultimately, *A Hard Day* is more clever than smart, but it's also so entertaining that such distinctions hardly matter. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Huevos: Little Rooster's Egg-Cellent Adventure ★★★

Lionsgate, 98 min., in Spanish & English-dubbed, PG/PG-13, DVD: \$19.98



Kicking off with a nightmarish opening scene in which a demon-ic-looking, huge-bosomed, hair-curlered housewife goes after anthropomorphic eggs (possibly because the woman is trying to cook breakfast?), *Huevos: Little Rooster's Egg-Cellent Adventure* focuses on undeveloped rooster Rolo (voiced by Zachary Gordon) and his group of farm friends: chickens, eggs (that can walk, talk, and creepily make out), and even a slice of bacon. The farm on which they live is going bankrupt, and when the old lady owner decides to sell off items, the creatures make plans to earn big money from a "boxing match"—which looks like cockfighting (illegal in the U.S.). Weaving in scenes of drunk poultry, a duck rap battle, and rats with the munchies, while also fashioning a love interest for Rolo ("she wants someone to pick a peck of pickled peppers with!"), this wacky, coarse tale winds up with an undercooked finale. I watched the PG version dubbed by an English voice cast, but the disc also includes the Spanish-language PG-13 original (perhaps some even bawdier jokes were lost in translation). Also featuring the voices of Jon Heder, Jason Mewes, and Keith David, this computer-animated film is optional, at best. (J. Williams-Wood)

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 2 ★★★

Lionsgate, 113 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, Mar. 22

Director Francis Lawrence's highly anticipated conclusion begins where *Part 1* left off, with bruised and battered Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) recovering after being almost choked to death by brainwashed

Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson). While Katniss vows to kill despotic President Snow (Donald Sutherland), resistance leader Alma Coin (Julianne Moore) says that Katniss is more valuable as the iconic Mockingjay, inspiring others to band together and end district rivalries in Panem. But this reduces Katniss to a primarily passive figurehead, assigned to the Star Squad, which infiltrates a Capitol that has been booby-trapped against the rebels. Lots of violent, often fatal CGI skirmishes ensue, particularly when the squad takes a claustrophobic underground route, and winds up in battles with slithering sewer slimes. Resilient stylist Effie Trinket (Elizabeth Banks) continues to flutter, while the videographer (Natalie Dormer) keeps the cameras rolling. Many feel that the third book in Suzanne Collins's trilogy is the weakest and never should have been split into two parts, but studio greed naturally prevailed. Even with the support of veterans Sutherland, Moore, Stanley Tucci, and the late Philip Seymour Hoffman (whose last Gamesmaker Plutarch Heavensbee's message is read aloud by Woody Harrelson's Haymitch), star Lawrence here seems to sense that this slog has become stale, while—as Katniss's suitors—Hutcherson and Liam Hemsworth are dismally dull lumps. Optional. (S. Granger)



I Believe in Unicorns

★★★
IndiePix, 80 min., not rated,
DVD: \$29.95

Whereas during the 1980s cinematic teenage angst was safe in the hands of real talents like John Hughes and Amy Heckerling, nowadays—if rookie director Leah Meyerhoff's debut is any measure—a teen's coming-of-age experience is reduced to kids moping around in a trance-like state dreaming of unicorns. Exuding a vaguely poetic sensibility, young protagonist Davina (played with soporific understatement by Natalia Dyer) is a shy high schooler who develops a crush on a brooding, cigarette-sucking skate punk named Sterling (Peter Vack). Although there is no chemistry between Sterling and Davina, both are obsessed with the idea of escape, but don't know where to go. So, they launch themselves on an impromptu roadtrip of indefinite duration, while Davina leaves her crippled wheelchair-bound mother to fend for herself. The rest of the story serves up a mélange of indulgent dream sequences (some involving the titular unicorns), 8mm home movie-style interludes, and the boring teen couple's random adventures—which amount to shoplifting, screwing, arguing, and eating at diners. Of course, Davina's naïve dreams of escaping reality and its attendant responsi-



bilities will eventually be crushed. The film's visual eccentricities, most prominently manifested in clips of Claymation and stop-motion photography (which complement the dream sequences) unfortunately fail to compensate for the general absence of a compelling story. Optional, at best. (M. Sandlin)

I Hope You Dance: The Power and Spirit of Song

★★★
Virgil, 96 min., not rated, DVD:
\$14.99

Originally broadcast on the Hallmark Channel, *I Hope You Dance* is a touching, inspirational documentary about the making of a song that many people have found healing and motivating during painful times. Half the film concerns the power of music to rally us, whether we're looking for answers or strength or relief from extraordinary challenges. In addition to comments from songwriters Tia Sillers and Mark D. Sanders about creating the titular hit country song, the documentary also features commentary from the song's singer Lee Ann Womack. Also on hand are the late Dr. Maya Angelou (who calls "I Hope You Dance" her favorite song), Vince Gill, Graham Nash (who performs "Teach Your Children"), and Brian Wilson (who plays a bit of "God Only Knows"). The remainder of the film serves up true stories about individuals who found ways to regain hope following tragedy, including grieving parents whose only child died yet lives on, in a sense, through the people who received her organs as transplants. And there is a heartening look at a homeless shelter in Phoenix where clients are learning ballroom dancing—turns out that learning to dance is both a confidence-booster and visibly lifts morale. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



In the Basement

★★★
Strand, 81 min., in German
w/English subtitles, not rated,
DVD: \$27.99

Director Ulrich Seidl's oddball documentary focuses on hobbies that his Austrian compatriots enjoy in the basement—an area of the home that is generally free from prying eyes. One elderly gent invites the members of his brass band to rehearse and drink in rooms filled with his cherished Nazi memorabilia. A hunter enthuses over the stuffed animal heads on his walls. A woman enters a storage room filled with dolls, which she gently extracts from their boxes and coos over like a mother waking her children. A man singing operatic arias at the top of his lungs also has a gun range in his basement. Midway through, the emphasis turns decidedly kinky as the camera visits a salesgirl-turned-prostitute and a client who brags about his potency,

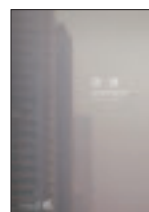


a woman who indulges in sadomasochism (and, ironically, works at a charity assisting victims of domestic abuse), and—most unsettling of all—a couple who play out a sexually-explicit sex-slave fantasy, with the corpulent, hirsute, and completely naked male acceding to every wish of a partner who can be brutally demanding. How much of this is truly documentary footage and how much is staged is somewhat unclear, but all is artfully arranged into formalized tableaux—characteristic of Seidl's style. A fascinating, frequently disturbing glimpse into the dark corners of the Austrian psyche, this is recommended for more adventurous collections. (F. Swietek)

The Iron Ministry

★★★
Icarus, 83 min., in Mandarin
w/English subtitles, not rated,
DVD: \$29.98

The Chinese passenger railway system might not sound like a scintillating subject for a documentary, but filmmaker J.P. Sniadecki uses a semi-immersive approach to thrust viewers into the experience of travel for ordinary Chinese citizens, along the way providing a glimpse of their views on political and economic matters (some are highly critical of government policy). Initially, viewers might be put off by minutes of black screen (apart from the titles) accompanied only by the noise of a moving train, followed by close-ups of creaking parts of a locomotive that only gradually morph into long tracking shots as the camera proceeds through aisles, picking up snatches of conversation—sometimes not translated—or following a vendor as he offers snacks and cigarettes from a pushcart. The first long dialogue passage comes when a small boy delivers a pseudo-announcement encouraging people to toss trash throughout the train and engage in even more unsavory conduct. Although the film was assembled from footage shot in various trains over several years, it is edited to suggest a single journey in which old, crowded, filthy accommodations on cars littered with cigarette butts are contrasted with scenes from newer trains, where people sit in comfort and toy with their smartphones or discuss their lives and dreams, either with other travelers or directly to the camera. One can read *The Iron Ministry* as a metaphor for the changing face of a nation in the throes of an economic revolution, but patient viewers will find it engrossing simply as a unique sensory experience. Recommended. (F. Swietek)



Jellyfish Eyes

★★★1/2
Criterion, 101 min., in Japanese w/English
subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

Internationally renowned visual artist Takashi Murakami's feature film serves up a fantasy of childhood innocence with fantastical

Pokemon-like creature playmates in a post-Fukushima world. *Jellyfish Eyes* is also a strange conspiracy tale involving a cult of young researchers in a mysterious lab who apply science and magic to transport creatures from an alternate reality. The central story revolves around a young boy named Masashi (Takuto Sueoka), who lost his father during a tsunami and has moved to a small town with his mother. After a cooing magical creature—looking vaguely like a mushroom doll—essentially adopts him, Masashi discovers that every kid has one of their own, which they control with a handheld device (much like a Gameboy) and send into battles. There is plenty of gentle satire here—game culture and addiction, merchandising, high school cliques and bullying, and religion—but no real teeth to the message or edge to the film. The kids are a flavorless bunch, while the adults have even less personality, and conflicts are resolved in a flash of generosity and rousing call to unity. *Jellyfish Eyes* ultimately can't decide if it is a parody of juvenile anime and game culture or simply an idealistically upbeat pop-art incarnation of the same. Optional. (S. Axmaker)



The Kindergarten Teacher ★★½

Kino Lorber, 120 min., in Hebrew w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95

Israeli filmmaker Nadav Lapid's ominously low-key drama centers on the mounting fixation that kindergarten teacher Nira (Sarit Lary) develops for one special pupil, a withdrawn, sensitive five-year-old boy named Yoav (Avi Shnaidman), the son of a fiery published writer. Quiet and sensitive after his parents' ugly divorce, Yoav seems to be a budding literary prodigy himself, verbally composing poems and ballads of love and loss that suggest maturity beyond his years—pieces that Nira obsessively tries to record and promote to other apathetic adults. She believes Yoav to be a Mozart-level genius who is going to waste in a decadent society, and she fatefully crosses personal and professional boundaries to get closer to his inscrutable creative soul. Although sometimes slow-moving, this highly-acclaimed film packs a wallop at the end. Highly recommended. (C. Cassidy)



The Last Witch Hunter ★

Lionsgate, 106 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99

Bald monotone star Vin Diesel plays Kaulder, a 14th-century hero who becomes immortal after foiling the



Witch Queen's effort to destroy humanity by inflicting the Black Death on the world. Cut to the present, where Kaulder is still involved in his war against black magic as the chief soldier in a religious society that has provided him with a succession of clerical helpers called Dolans over the years. When the current Dolan (Michael Caine) is killed and replaced by a newcomer (Elijah Wood), Kaulder is sent on a mission to discover what nefarious plot the witches are hatching. The search takes him to a bar run by a spunky white witch (Rose Leslie) who becomes his unlikely sidekick on a quest that culminates in a confrontation with the resurrected Queen, who is still determined to annihilate humankind. The contorted plot is replete with oddball characters and complications that are illogical even by the low standards of this kind of genre nonsense, but all of the mystical gobbledygook quickly grows tiresome and the visual effects are astonishingly shabby. The makers of this gargantuan misfire might have hoped it would serve as the start of a new franchise, but it's more likely that this will be the last *Last Witch Hunter*. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Like You Mean It ★★

Breaking Glass, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$21.99

A somber tone permeates writer-director-star Philipp Karner's somewhat listless *Like You Mean It*. Karner plays Mark, a struggling actor and one-half of a once-smooth romantic relationship with musician Jonah (Denver Milord). Subject to anxiety and depression, Mark slowly sinks into a dark hole, while the emotionally stable, upbeat Jonah watches in helpless frustration. A steady visual refrain offers glimpses of the couple in happy early days that sharply contrast with current scenes of strained communication and out-of-sync interest in the bedroom (and everywhere else). Sequences of the pair at therapy sessions suggest more unraveling than healing—no amount of relationship exercises or pharmaceuticals is going to help. Karner sprinkles in revelations concerning Mark's troubled connection with his family-of-origin, but for the most part the film offers a too obvious trajectory of a partnership losing steam. Optional. (T. Keogh)



The Looking Glass ★½

First Run, 110 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95

Largely a vanity project for writer-actress Dorothy Tristan (whose onscreen credits include 1972's *Klute*), *The Looking Glass* is a thin drama about an unhappy 13-year-old girl named Julie (Grace Tarnow), whose mother dies, after which Julie goes to stay with her



cantankerous grandmother, Karen (Tristan). Karen is a legendary, retired actress of stage and screen who lives semi-independently on a rural spread. She is also beginning to slide into dementia and has cardiac problems. Despite these obstacles, Karen takes in Julie, but winds up being judgmental and prickly towards the girl. Auditions for a community theater production lure Julie into her first stage experience, a development that thrills Karen. But Julie's grief is made worse by a two-timing boy, while the arrival of her father adds further complications. As Julie, Tarnow is one-note, which makes Tristan's shot at a virtuoso performance that much more obvious in this film directed by Tarnow's husband, John Hancock. A disappointing effort, this is not a necessary purchase. (T. Keogh)

Macbeth ★★½

Anchor Bay, 113 min., R, DVD: \$22.98, Blu-ray: \$26.99, Mar. 8

The atmosphere is the real star of this new screen version of Shakespeare's classic tragedy, in which Michael Fassbender's ambitious Scottish thane and Marion Cotillard's manipulative Lady Macbeth (not to mention the Bard's text) play second fiddle to the graphic-novel mood of gloom, blood, and fatalism favored by director Justin Kurzel. Still, the film does possess interesting elements, the most intriguing being its focus on father-son relationships. *Macbeth* begins with a scene in which the central couple presides over the funeral of an infant (presumably theirs), and next turns to the death of a boy—either Macbeth's older son or a favored squire to whom he's become a surrogate father—during the initial battle sequence. Later, the narrative centers not only on Duncan (David Thewlis) and his son Malcolm (Jack Reynor), but also on Banquo (Paddy Considine) and his young son Fleance (Lochlann Harris)—the latter taking up the sword to avenge his murdered father at the close. It also shows the fiery execution of Macduff's (Sean Harris) children along with his wife—a fire motif that continues in the red hue that is added to the final reel, as Macduff sets aflame the timbers his soldiers are carrying from Birnam Wood to confront Macbeth. While these interpretive touches are admittedly provocative, this *Macbeth* remains a lugubriously grim affair, with much of the text whispered or mumbled, often against montages of extraneous visuals. Fassbender brings a leonine gruffness to Macbeth but doesn't convey the character's emotional descent, while neither he nor Cotillard bring much poetry to the verse. Overall, this feels more like Kurzel's *Macbeth* than Shakespeare's. Still, it should be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



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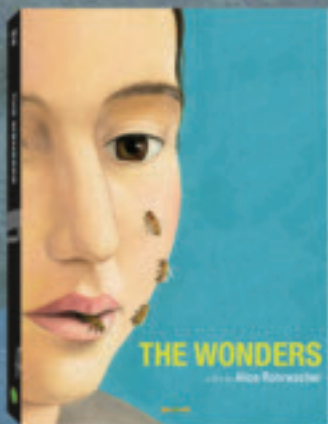


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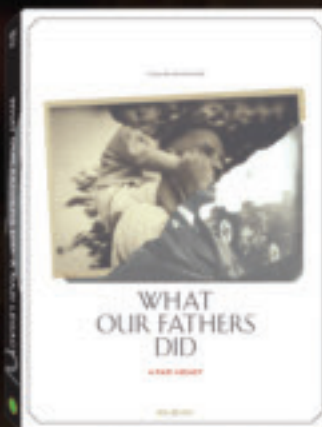


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STREET DATE: MARCH 8, 2016

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Making Rounds ★★★

First Run, 88 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95



Muffie Meyer, who co-directed and co-edited the classic documentary *Grey Gardens*, helms this compelling portrait of Drs. Valentin Fuster and Herschel Sklaroff, two cardiologists at New York's Mount Sinai Hospital. As the film's title suggests, the doctors make their rounds and speak at length with patients in the hospital's Cardiac Care Unit while accompanied by young doctors-in-training. The work is not easy, by any stretch, with challenges coming from the patients (including a man suffering from heart failure who adamantly refuses to accept prescribed treatment) and the medical system itself (some patients have previously misdiagnosed issues). While the film touches on many problems that bedevil Mount Sinai Hospital and the wider U.S. healthcare environment, the core focus of *Making Rounds* is on the charming doctors, who spend liberal amounts of time listening to their patients' needs and communicating their diagnoses with an impressive sense of both maturity and sincerity. In many ways, Fuster and Sklaroff represent a higher standard of physician care, and one can only hope that their acolytes will carry on their noble tradition. Recommended. (P. Hall)

Man Up ★★★

Lionsgate, 89 min., R, DVD or Blu-ray: \$19.98



A romantic comedy for the modern age with a decidedly British sensibility, *Man Up* stars Lake Bell as Nancy, a thirtysomething writer and singleton living in London who has given up on dating. Simon Pegg costars as disappointed divorcee Jack, who is trying out Internet dating for the first time. At a train station, Jack mistakes Nancy for "Jessica"—his 24-year-old blind date—and Nancy goes with the flow, until the truth inevitably comes out and their terrific chemistry devolves into arguments and recriminations. Such is the bumpy road to true love, or at the very least second chances. For all of the rom-com conventions here (starting with that mistaken-identity/meet-cute premise), director Ben Palmer's *Man Up* exudes a low-key charm and offers an adult take on expectations, disappointments, and missed opportunities along the way to a happy ending. Pegg dials down the geekiness and slacker comedy of his usual roles to portray a man genuinely hurt by his failed marriage but putting on a good face. And Bell, who is superb at comic awkwardness and self-effacing humor, adopts a convincing British accent and exhibits a touching vulnerability. A sweet and satisfying film that sports an easygoing humor, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The Martian ★★★

Fox, 141 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Based on Andy Weir's best-selling novel, Ridley Scott's multiple-Oscar-nominated *The Martian* is an exhilarating, super-suspenseful saga of an astronaut who is accidentally stranded on Mars. When a colossal dust storm forces the Ares III crew to abort their Mars surface exploration, Commander Lewis (Jessica Chastain) orders a hasty evacuation, believing that crewmate Mark Watney (Matt Damon) has been killed by flying debris. But as satellite photography soon reveals, Watney is alive. So it's up to NASA director Sanders (Jeff Daniels) and his cohorts at Pasadena's Jet Propulsion Laboratory to figure out how to help Watney stay that way in the habitation module, and rescue him before his food supply runs out. Fortunately, Watney is a resourceful botanist and courageous problem-solver. After removing the shrapnel lodged in his torso, he's faced with basic survival tasks. "I'm gonna have to science the shit out of this," he declares, and then proceeds to improvise and innovate while displaying a disarmingly acerbic sense of humor. Of course, there are unforeseen catastrophes waiting in the wings. Damon is charming and utterly convincing as the geeky contemporary Robinson Crusoe, ably supported by a stellar backup cast that includes Chiwetel Ejiofor, Sean Bean, Kristen Wiig, and Michael Peña. An enthralling sci-fi adventure epic, this is highly recommended. Editor's Choice. (S. Granger)

Meet the Patels ★★1/2

Alchemy, 88 min., PG, DVD: \$19.99



This extended home movie documentary by siblings Geeta and Ravi Patel draws laughs based on intergenerational and intercultural divisions within the Indian-American community. Geeta is behind the camera, recording the family's efforts to find a wife for Ravi, an actor, who narrates here and also occasionally appears in animated sequences as a cartoon version of himself. But the most memorable characters are their parents, Champa and Vasant, traditionalists determined to see their son married to an appropriate Indian bride, although they are also willing to make some adjustments to the process their family has followed since time immemorial—which has been to not just wed another "Patel" (a name more common in India than Smith or Jones is in America) but also a Patel from a *specific* region in the Gujarat area. Ravi has been secretly dating an American named Audrey for some time, but when they break up, he agrees to accept his parents' help in finding a suitable mate. That involves going over résumés from Indian dat-

ing sites, meeting plausible candidates, and even attending a "Patel convention" where marriageable members of the huge clan engage in speed-dating. Ravi also visits friends and family who invariably have certain women in mind. Most of this is genial and good-natured, but also somewhat repetitive, and the outcome of Ravi's search for a bride probably won't come as much of a surprise for viewers. Still, this sporadically amusing true-life rom-com should be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Mississippi Grind ★★★

Lionsgate, 109 min., R, DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$24.99



Ryan Reynolds and Ben Mendelsohn star in this road movie about two gamblers who meet over a poker game and team up to bet their way from Iowa to a big tournament in New Orleans. Reynolds is the charismatic Curtis, generous and trusting to a fault, while Mendelsohn is self-destructive Gerry, a hopeless gambling addict and pathological liar whose past is a wrecking yard of ruined relationships and failed promises. *Mississippi Grind* plays like a '70s character drama, an oddball buddy movie in which the anti-heroes journey through a landscape of card rooms, dice tables, and racetracks. Filmmaking team Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck (*Half Nelson*) have a knack for finding the right patter of dialogue, rhythms of body language, and expressive silences between words. Shot on location along the Mississippi River, the film offers a great tour of the backroads of the American Dream, where folks make bets in hopes of fortune, playing until the money is gone. Sienna Miller, Analeigh Tipton, and Robin Weigert costar as the women in the lives of the central drifters, while Alfre Woodard has a memorable scene as a loan shark. A solid indie film, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Natural Resistance ★★★

Kino Lorber, 86 min., in Italian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95



The attitude of filmmaker Jonathan Nossiter toward globalization of the wine industry and the standardization of its products has already been made abundantly clear in both his feature documentary *Mondovino* (VL Online-9/05) and his identically-named 10-part TV series follow-up (VL-3/10). Nossiter takes up the struggle anew here, shifting his focus in order to decry governmental policies, particularly regulations coming from the European Union that seem designed to drive artisanal winemakers (and cheese producers) out of business. Nossiter makes his argument largely through conversations with growers



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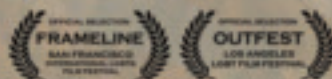
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Product #: 3611-2 | UPC: 7 12267 36112 0
85 Minutes - Color
Widescreen - Not Rated
In Spanish with English subtitles



who try to continue to follow traditional techniques in four regions of Italy. The most memorable is certainly Stefano Bellotti, a radical Piedmont farmer who discourses learnedly on history and science while also taking up a shovel to show the soil differences between his neighbor's vineyards and his own. Other interviewees include Giovanna Tiezzi and Stefano Borsa, who operate a winery from a converted Tuscan monastery; Corrado Dottori and Valerio Bochi, who have retreated from Milan to their grandfather's farm in the Marches; and Elena Pantaleoni, a former librarian now tending vineyards on her father's land in Emilia. All offer wry commentary on having to contend with bureaucratic interference, while Nossiter intersperses clips from classic films and animated segments to add variety. Sure to appeal to oenophiles, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

The New Girlfriend

★★★

Cohen, 108 min., in French w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98

The "new girlfriend" of Francois Ozon's comic drama isn't what you might expect. Mourning the sudden death of his young wife Laura (played by Isild Le Besco in flashbacks), widower David (Romain Duris) calms himself and his infant son by dressing in his wife's clothes. This shocks Laura's best friend Claire (Anaïs Demoustier), even after David explains that Laura knew about this predilection. But as Claire spends more time with David's feminine side (which he names Virginia), she becomes enchanted with her new girlfriend. It's tempting to call this film a dark comedy—it's based on a novel by author Ruth Rendell (a specialist in mysteries and psychological thrillers)—but while full of wit, there is actually very little darkness in this playful psychological drama. David is neither gay nor transsexual, and the central pair's girlish outings ultimately lead to sexual attraction, which complicates matters since Claire is happily married. Rather, *The New Girlfriend* offers a celebration of a fluid sexual identity—a nonjudgmental acceptance of what years ago might have been considered perverse or unnatural—presented as a healthy acknowledgment of a non-threatening desire that also creates a pathway to a new kind of friendship as Claire becomes a conspirator in David's secret life. An elegant, sensuous production with a light comic touch from a noted Gallic filmmaker, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

One Eyed Girl ★★

Dark Sky, 103 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

A psychologist despondent over the sui-

cide of one of his patients falls into a cult's orbit with disastrous results in this Australian psychological thriller. Travis (Mark Leonard Winter) is so distraught over the death he failed to prevent that he goes into a deadly emotional tailspin, but is saved by a support group that he is introduced to by Grace (Tilda Cobham-Hervey), a beautiful girl Travis met who was handing out pamphlets on his commuter train. Travis is taken to their isolated rural compound, where the charismatic Father Jay (Steve Le Marquand) presides over a family of docile followers. Initially, Travis is impressed by Jay's apparently supportive methods, but when he sees the cult leader taking advantage of a fragile young member of the flock, he attempts to intervene—with tragic consequences. Filmmaker Nick Matthews's low-budget film builds a mood of unease, but the pace is extremely slow, and apart from Father Jay, the characters are sketchy, and some of the action simply strains credulity. Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)



Our Brand Is Crisis

★★★1/2

Warner, 107 min., R, DVD: \$28.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

Apart from weapons shipped to other nations, perhaps the worst U.S. export nowadays is political consultants, who having debased American elections with unsavory methods, are now busily engaged doing the same in foreign climes. Their baleful influence is the subject of David Gordon Green's well-meaning but uneven dramedy, which doesn't quite do justice to its promising premise as either comedy or drama. *Our Brand Is Crisis* is a fictionalized take on the 2002 presidential election in Bolivia, during which James Carville helped elect a disgraced ex-president over populist Evo Morales. Here, the Carville character is "Calamity" Jane Bodine (Sandra Bullock), a burned-out recluse coming out of retirement to advise a senator running well behind other candidates, including an entertainer-turned-politician who has a U.S. consultant too—Pat Candy (Billy Bob Thornton), a man who has always been her nemesis. By refashioning the dour senator as a fighter in a time of crisis, Bodine turns him into a serious contender, while she and Candy trade dirty tricks on the way to Election Day. Although obviously intended to be sharp satire, for the most part this is an oddly muted film that occasionally switches to rambunctious slapstick and often veers into soapy drama. Still, the star power makes this a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



Paranormal Activity: The Ghost Dimension ★

Paramount, 87 min., R, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99

Paranormal Activity (2009) served up a stylistically clever variant on the found footage horror formula using stationary cameras, but succeeding installments floundered. This sixth entry provides a sort-of summation of the fractured mythology involving a demon that haunts houses and their residents, plowing well-worn ground as cheerful couple Ryan (Chris J. Murray) and Emily (Brit Shaw), along with their young daughter Leila (Ivy George), move into a house that is suspiciously affordable. Among the former occupants' stuff they find an antique video camera that reveals strange, bubbly bits of unseen energy, and old tapes that depict two girls being inducted into witchcraft by a sinister man. At the same time, Leila begins talking to an invisible friend, and poltergeist-like phenomena starts occurring, which the parents try to capture on film. The couple even go so far as to call in a priest, who concludes that everything happening is the result of an agreement that the previous owner made with a demon who needs to possess children in order to assume human form. When the cleric remarks "what we need is an extermination"—one can't help but be grateful that this is purportedly the final installment in the series. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)



The Pearl Button ★★★

Kino Lorber, 82 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95, Mar. 22

Chilean filmmaker Patricio Guzmán is known for his documentaries focusing on the 1973 coup that overthrew President Salvador Allende—which ushered in the repressive military regime of Augusto Pinochet—including *The Battle of Chile*; *Chile, Obstinate Memory* (VL-1/99); and *Salvador Allende* (VL Online-6/07). In his latest essay, the overriding metaphor is the sea off Chile's long coastline, where he compares the plight of the indigenous people of Patagonia—whose maritime lifestyle was crushed by governmental decree—with the Pinochet regime's habit of disposing of corpses by tossing them into the ocean from helicopters. The two threads are linked by the story of Jemmy Button, a tribesman who was lured by a pearl bauble into traveling to Europe in the 19th century and then returning to Patagonia having lost his identity (a button found on one of the rails that were used to weigh down the bodies of junta victims provides a visual connection). Guzmán's reflections on water as essential to life are reinforced by observations from artists, poets, and scientists. Evocative



LAND IS BOUGHT IN BLOOD

In 1872, JOHN HENRY CLAYTON (Kiefer Sutherland) retires as a gunfighter and returns to his hometown of Fowler, Wyoming in hope of repairing his relationship with his estranged father, REVEREND CLAYTON (Donald Sutherland). However, he soon learns that the town is in turmoil, as the railroad will be coming through the area and a criminal gang is terrorizing ranchers who refuse to sell their land. John Henry is the only one who can stop them, but his father does not want his son to return to a life of violence.



FORSAKEN - DVD

ITEM #: EOE-DV-8104

UPC: 7-41952-81049-0 | SRP: \$29.98 | Western | 89 Minutes

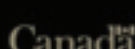
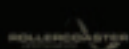
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UPC: 7-41952-81269-2 | SRP: \$32.98 | Western | 89 Minutes

PRE-ORDER DATE: 2/23/2016

STREET DATE: 3/29/2016



and hypnotic, *The Pearl Button* continues Guzmán's effort to keep the memory of the horrifying events of the '70s alive while also comparing them with earlier instances of man's inhumanity to man. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

The Piper ★★1/2

CJ Entertainment, 119 min., in Korean w/English subtitles and English-dubbed, PG-13, DVD: \$19.98



In filmmaker Kim Gwang-tae's weirdly unsettling horror film, the fable of the Pied Piper of Hamelin is transposed to South Korea in the early 1950s. Kim (Ryu Seung-ryong) is a crippled flautist, traveling to Seoul to seek medical help for his tubercular young son. The two stumble into an isolated village, where they are received kindly by the chief (Lee Sung-min). After learning that the place is infested with carnivorous rats, Kim offers to drive the vermin away with his flute in return for money to cover his son's medical expenses. The process involves luring the rodents—a sequence that looks disturbingly real—into a cave where they are trapped, and it requires a mystical ritual as well as music. The chief, however, reneges on his promise to Kim, especially after the piper reveals to the villagers that the Korean War is over, a fact the chief has been keeping secret in order to maintain iron-fisted control. But the old man manages to turn the townspeople against Kim, condemning him as a dangerous outsider—perhaps a Communist spy—and instigating the mob to take action against Kim and his son. This betrayal will induce Kim to take grisly revenge. One senses that *The Piper* is intended to be a parable about political corruption in South Korea, but its more subtle criticisms will be lost on outsiders, although it is often effective on a basic ghoulish level. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Prince ★★★

Kino Lorber, 77 min., in Dutch w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95

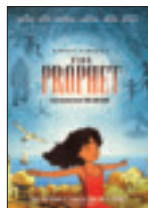


This gritty urban drama from director Sam de Jong is set in the drab apartment blocks of multicultural Amsterdam, far away from the middle-class pseudo-bohemian decadence of that European capital's tourist-gorged city center. The story centers on gangly, awkward Moroccan-born teen Ayoub (Ayoub Elasri), a budding gangbanger who hangs out along with his outcast adolescent buddies on the turf of the ruling neighborhood gang of twentysomething toughs—although these buffoonish ATV-riding hoodlums don't exactly evoke the Bloods and Crips. Ayoub lives quietly with his half-sister and depressive mother,

who has long been divorced from Ayoub's heroin-addict father. Ayoub's conspicuous pubescent lust for Laura, girlfriend of one of the local gang members, begins to lead him down a dangerous path as he tries to lure her away from the number one bad boy in the 'hood. Ayoub soon finds himself involved with a local Lamborghini-driving drug dealer—entering an initiation into a violent criminal underworld that gives Ayoub the courage to pursue Laura. *Prince* suffers a bit from a flat, unimaginative script—the central boy-gets-girl narrative here just doesn't hold up to close scrutiny—but this often gutsy slice of social realism is directed with bracing verve by de Jong. Recommended, overall. (M. Sandlin)

The Prophet ★★1/2

Universal, 86 min., PG, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98



This animated adaptation of Lebanese-American poet Kahlil Gibran's inspirational volume of essays—a passion project from producer/actress Salma Hayek—reframes the simple premise of the 1923 book as a political allegory with spiritual dimensions. The noble poet Mustafa (voiced by Liam Neeson) is a political dissident released from house arrest and promised freedom as long as he returns to his homeland forever. As he's being led out of town by a pompous, somewhat sinister Sergeant (Alfred Molina), he is feted by the grateful villagers and invited to wax eloquent on love, marriage, work, children, and other topics, taken directly from Gibran's poems. Some are read by Neeson in a rich, gravelly, compassionate voice, others are transformed into songs, and all are set against lovely, expressionistic animated sequences directed by talented guest filmmakers, including Nina Paley (*Sita Sings the Blues*), Joann Sfar (*The Rabbi's Cat*), Tomm Moore (*The Secret of Kells*), and Oscar winners Joan Gratz and Bill Plympton. The rest of the film is directed by Roger Allers, who co-directed *The Lion King*, and he brings a Disney quality to the central story, ranging from the slapstick humor around a mute girl named Almitra (a character created for the film) to the design of the caricatured villains (although *The Prophet* features some fairly dark material and is not a kid's film, per se). Fans of the beloved book will appreciate this respectful adaptation, while others may find it too new-agey, but the guest sequences are beautiful works in their own right. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Queen of Earth ★★★

MPI, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.98

Filmmaker Alex Ross Perry's *Queen of Earth* stars Elisabeth Moss as Catherine, a young woman reeling not only from the sudden death of her father but also from the emotional fallout of a bad breakup. Catherine

takes refuge in the comfort of her best friend, Virginia (Katherine Waterston), a trust-fund baby spending her days on perpetual vacation in her family's upscale vacation cabin in the woods. The pair are ostensibly there for each other, yet are so self-involved they can barely break out of their own little bubbles. Somewhat spoiled and not very likable, these privileged women are not softened by either the filmmaker or the actresses. Moss's Catherine is vulnerable and in pain, tangled in a torrent of contradictory emotions—anger, betrayal, love, hate—but also narcissistic and lacking any ability to empathize, while Waterston is distant and wary as Virginia, who is still angry at Catherine's neglect of her own troubles during a previous getaway. It's like an American indie reworking of Hollywood high melodrama—initial pettiness and sniping growing into a passive-aggressive war between bitchy frenemies in close quarters—but instead of the theatrical thrill of a showboating spectacle of divas dueling with sophisticated wit and sneering delivery, the audience witnesses something uncomfortably intimate and personal. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Samba ★★1/2

Broad Green, 119 min., in French w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$26.99



In filmmakers Eric Toledano and Olivier Nakache's *Samba*, charismatic actor Omar Sy stars as the title character, a gentle Senegalese man who has been living in France illegally for a decade and is now threatened with expulsion. But the plight of undocumented workers plays second fiddle here to the conventions of romantic comedy after Samba is committed to a detention camp, where he is offered help by an immigrants' aid group represented by nervous Alice (Charlotte Gainsbourg), a mousy woman who immediately forms an emotional bond with Samba that will naturally blossom into full-fledged romance. Of course, no rom-com would be complete without colorful supporting characters, so *Samba* supplies not only a vivacious colleague for Alice but also a reckless Brazilian lothario who is one of Samba's homeless friends; the pair provide many of the film's most overtly comic moments (including an impromptu dance on a window-washing platform that wouldn't be out of place in *Magic Mike*). But these humorous bits are juxtaposed, rather uncomfortably, with increasingly intense dramatic episodes revolving around Samba's imminent deportation, and the mixture is jarring. Toledano and Nakache obviously decry the harsh approach that France—and other European nations—has taken to im-

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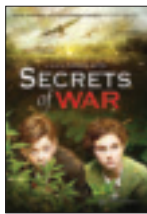
  
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migration policy, but they've chosen to send their message in a lightweight format that ultimately compromises their good intentions. Even so, this often entertaining film should be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Secrets of War ★★★

Film Movement, 95 min., in Dutch w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95



Adapted from a 2007 best-selling young adult novel by Dutch author Jacques Vriens, *Secrets of War* features a familiar premise—the horrors of war as seen through the eyes of children. Set in the Netherlands in the beginning days of WWII, the story follows two schoolboys, Tuur (Maas Bronkhuyzen) and Lambert (Joes Brauers), as they go about their normal lives playing games, exploring caves, and roughhousing while the Nazi Party slowly ingratiates itself within their small village. The best friends look at war with wide-eyed wonder, laughing while hiding in underground bunkers during air raids and hurling rocks at German trains that pass with mysterious cargo. Two events will change their experience with the war: a young girl comes to the village to live with her aunt and uncle, and Lambert's father becomes the Nazi-appointed mayor of the village. Uncovered secrets, young love, and shifting allegiances cause these events to intersect, changing the boys' friendship and life in the village forever. Filmmaker Dennis Bots's *Secrets of War* unfolds somewhat predictably, but it serves up an unflinching yet age-suitable portrayal of the destruction caused by the Nazi occupation. Recommended. (P. Morehart)

Sinister 2 ★1/2

Universal, 98 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98



The 2012 original *Sinister* spun a convoluted found-footage tale about a demon called Bughuul, who cajoled children into murdering their families while filming the slaughter. Further elaborating on an already labyrinthine premise, *Sinister 2* has all the children Bughuul turned into killers now serving as his ghostly recruiters, enticing other unhappy kids to watch their home movies as training reels for new massacres. Their current target is Dylan (Robert Sloan), a shy boy living with his mother Courtney (Shannyn Sossamon) and more extroverted twin brother in an abandoned Illinois farmhouse (after they fled an abusive husband/father). The house happens to be adjacent to a decrepit church where the spirits of Bughuul and his child minions now reside. Dylan is apparently being primed to kill his mother and brother, but

Bughuul's plan is thwarted by the arrival of a cop (James Ransone) who witnessed events in the original film and has now turned serial arsonist, destroying places he believes might be the sites of future massacres. None of this makes the slightest lick of sense, but it all winds up with the family and the cop being threatened with immolation on some hastily-made crosses. Inane, ineptly made, and curiously dull, filmmaker Ciaran Foy's *Sinister 2* represents a precipitous decline from Scott Derrickson's *Sinister*, which at least boasted a few genuinely spooky moments. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Sleeping With Other People ★★★

Paramount, 101 min., R, DVD: \$29.98

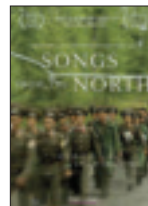


Although one might reasonably hope that independently-made romantic comedies would improve on their big-studio counterparts, filmmaker Leslye Headland's *Sleeping With Other People* certainly doesn't. In fact, her script is based on the standard clichéd rom-com premise: Jake (Jason Sudeikis) and Lainey (Alison Brie) are obviously meant to be together, but they decide to remain "just friends"...until the final reel, when they belatedly realize what the audience already knew 90 minutes earlier: they can't live without each other. Before that conclusion, of course, both develop relationships with others—in Lainey's case, a caddish married doctor; for Jake, a co-worker and single mom—who naturally aren't compatible and they predictably end badly. Along for the ride are the inevitable wisecracking best friends who serve as the constant snark chorus. Sudeikis and Brie are personable and attractive leads, but they're undercut by a script featuring reams of hyper-articulate dialogue that smacks more of the word processor than real life. Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

Songs From the North

★★★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 72 min., in Korean & English w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95



North Korea is an enigma: everyone has heard of it, but few in the West have ever seen it. Filmmaker Soon-Mi Yoo made three visits to the country, stitching together her footage with ample chunks of North Korean film and TV productions to offer here a startling view of a nation that seems to exist in a parallel universe. Thanks to the oddball Kim dynasty that has ruled North Korea since its creation in the aftermath of World War II, the country appears stuck in an endless rehash of Cold War battles. Popular culture and museums obsess over the invasion by the U.S. military during the Korean War, absurdly

lavishing praise on Kim Il-sung for saving the country from Uncle Sam's imperialism. But as filmmaker Yoo cogently observes, North Korea only has myths but no history to embrace. There is no celebration of pre-war Korea, nor any contemporary cultural voices that offer anything but praise for the government. Yoo's camera finds a bizarre environment where grand highways and avenues are absent of vehicles, and sweeping plazas stand virtually vacant. Few North Koreans are comfortable with being filmed, and only the entreaties of a friendly group of schoolchildren here offers evidence of universal behavior. A fascinating film that lends insight into the least understood of Asian nations, this is highly recommended. (P. Hall)

Spotlight ★★★★★

Universal, 129 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98



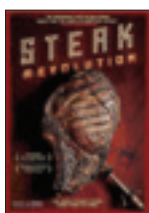
A fascinating, true crime story of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Boston Globe* investigation that revealed the Roman Catholic Church's systematic cover-up of pedophile priests, the Oscar-nominated *Spotlight* is also the name of the *Globe*'s investigative team, headed up by Walter "Robby" Robinson (Michael Keaton) and comprised of Michael Rezendes (Mark Ruffalo), Sacha Pfeiffer (Rachel McAdams), and Matt Carroll (Brian d'Arcy James). The group reports to managing editor Ben Bradlee, Jr. (John Slattery), whose father figured prominently in the Watergate-themed *All the President's Men*. After the *Globe* was bought by the *New York Times* in 2001, a new out-of-towner boss arrived: cost-cutting Marty Baron (Liev Schreiber). Marty fearlessly urges the team to pursue a molestation allegation, a subject that the newspaper has traditionally ignored under tacit pressure from Cardinal Bernard Law (Len Cariou) and officials in the Archdiocese of Boston. Spotlight soon learns that what they are dealing with is not an isolated incident. Indeed, scores of similar claims have been privately settled by an evasive attorney, Eric MacLeish (Billy Crudup), outside the legal system, while those involving paperwork have been sealed by complicit judges—thereby "turning child abuse into a cottage industry." Directed by Tom McCarthy, the film reveals an institutional conspiracy that protected predators and perpetuated their heinous behavior, moving priests from parish to parish, a process gradually revealed by wary lawyer Mitchell Garabedian (Stanley Tucci), who steers the team in the right direction once he realizes their serious intent. A compelling drama that illuminates a timely, still-relevant issue, this is highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (S. Granger)

Steak (R)evolution

★★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 112 min., in English, French, Italian, and Japanese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95

Distinctly going against the contemporary grain of documentaries on health-conscious/plant-based diets, Gallic filmmaker Franck Ribière's documentary celebrates meat. Declaring that French viande cookery has been hobbled by butchers' preference for lean, well-muscled animals—and by “nutritionists” (horreurs!)—Ribière travels to Brazil, the United States, Canada, Scotland, England, Japan, Sweden, and Italy in a countdown (not always mathematically sequential) of the top steak-serving restaurants and their techniques. Not surprisingly, a salut goes out to small family farms, where cattle are fattened and conditioned with the best possible feed, exercise, and care (until they are slaughtered, of course). A Japanese Kobe beef farmer admits that he does massage his animals, but, unlike others, he does not make them drink beer (the beasts get too drunk too fast). And the revelation of where to find the finest steak in the world makes for a worthy climax. Among authors interviewed are Mark Schatzker and Rene Laporte, while top chefs visited include Sébastien Bras and the late Marcos Bassi. A premium entrée for foodies, this is highly recommended. (C. Cassidy)



Steve Jobs ★★1/2

Universal, 123 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98

In 1984, Apple co-founder Steve Jobs (Michael Fassbender) unveils the Macintosh, changing the computer world forever. But behind the scenes, turmoil reigns. Jobs's friend/collaborator Steve Wozniak (Seth Rogen) and CEO John Sculley (Jeff Daniels) both have serious issues, while Jobs's marketing chief—Joanna Hoffman (Kate Winslet)—is struggling with monetary demands from Jobs's ex-girlfriend, Chrisann Brennan (Katherine Waterston), mother of his illegitimate daughter Lisa. Four years later, following his ouster from Apple, Jobs arrogantly presents another product launch—the NeXT black box, after which he triumphantly returns to Apple, introducing the iMac in 1998. Within this fragmentary “backstage” narrative, Oscar-nominated Fassbender deftly embodies Jobs's relentless nature, subtly revealing not only how Jobs views the world through a “reality distortion field,” but also how he ruthlessly bullies those around him. Screenwriter Aaron Sorkin and director Danny Boyle together create a complex, dialogue-driven character study, based on Walter Isaacson's bestselling 2011 biography, coupled with obviously fictional-



ized encounters. Significantly, Sorkin was able to interview Jobs's daughter, who was not involved with Isaacson's book. And it's Jobs's relationship with Lisa (played over the years by Makenzie Moss, Ripley Sobo, and Perla Haney-Jardine) that serves to humanize him, particularly after he discovers that his chief engineer, Andy Hertzfeld (Michael Stuhlbarg), paid Liza's Harvard tuition. Unlike traditional biography, only patchy mentions are made here of Jobs's adoption, childhood rejection, and pioneering, formative years, and the chronology stops before the birth of the now-ubiquitous iPhone or Jobs's ill-fated battle with cancer. Highly recommended. (S. Granger)

Stonewall ★★

Lionsgate, 129 min., R, DVD: \$19.98

The Greenwich Village bar where a 1969 anti-harassment riot turned into the opening salvo in the gay liberation movement provides the title of Roland Emmerich's film, which is ultimately nothing more than an old-fashioned fictional coming-of-age tale set against the backdrop of that watershed event. After Danny Winters (Jeremy Irvine), a handsome high-school kid in small-town Indiana, is caught in a compromising situation with the team quarterback, his father—who is also the homophobic football coach—exiles him from the family homestead. Danny heads for New York, where he quickly finds himself on Christopher Street, center of the city's gay subculture. Totally looking the part of the straight-arrow stud, Danny falls in with a crowd of high-spirited locals, most notably Ray, aka Ramona (Jonny Beauchamp), a reedy, androgynous extrovert who takes Danny under his infatuated wing. But Danny also catches the eye of Trevor (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), a straitlaced member of the Mattachine Society, who encourages him to abandon his colorful new friends and adopt a more moderate approach to effecting social change. The film predictably becomes a struggle for Danny's soul between the forces of militancy and compromise, leading up to the Stonewall riot. While heartfelt, *Stonewall* is also stilted, cliché-ridden, manipulative, and ultimately unworthy of its subject. Optional, at best. (F. Swietek)



Sunshine Superman

★★★

Magnolia, 102 min., PG, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98, Mar. 1

A CNN-Norwegian co-production, *Sunshine Superman* looks back on the life and legacy of extreme sports figure Carl Boenish, a skydiver who invented the dangerous feat of BASE jumping—i.e., leaps from cliff faces, towers, skyscrapers and



other low-altitude fixed structures. While he was an engineer at Hughes Aircraft, the outgoing Boenish started filming his own skydiving, even landing a behind-the-scenes role doing aerial footage for John Frankenheimer's 1969 parachute drama *The Gypsy Moths*. Later, Boenish specialized in freefalling cinematography, capturing amazing (pre-video, pre-GoPro) celluloid of skydivers. Boenish met and married Jean—portrayed here in period re-enactments by first-time director Marah Strauch, niece of a BASE enthusiast—who turned out to also be an adrenaline junkie. That Boenish, who obsessively filmed/archived all of his antics, isn't being interviewed here is a rather obvious tipoff that something must have gone awry, and we are walked through the 1984 stunt—contrived for a David Frost/Guinness Book TV special—that ended his life. In the aftermath, Jean's decision to continue to BASE jump earned the widow much criticism. An intriguing don't-try-this-at-home biographical documentary, this is recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Sweaty Betty ★★1/2

Breaking Glass, 94 min., not rated, DVD: \$21.99

Likely to tax the patience of more than a few viewers, *Sweaty Betty* is a crude, meandering documentary-style film that nevertheless carries a certain shambling charm. Semi-improvised, the movie takes place on a warm day on the edges of Washington D.C., where two single dads, Rico (Rico Mitchell) and Scooby (Seth Dubose), talk about being responsible and plot out their morning and afternoon with their young children. After this protracted material is over, the fun begins with the introduction of Charlotte, a 1,000-pound sow who is a fixture in the neighborhood, wandering where she will and used as a public attraction by her well-meaning owner. With animal-control officers looking unhappy, Charlotte swims in creeks and participates in tailgating parties for Redskins games. Rico and Scooby's tale overlaps with Charlotte's—albeit without much logic—in a film that carries a mellow, sunny tone. A strong optional purchase. (T. Keogh)



Tokyo Fiancée ★★

First Run, 100 min., in English, French & Japanese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95

Based on a semi-autobiographical novel by bestselling French-language author Amélie Nothomb, *Tokyo Fiancée* begins as an engaging, infectiously happy tale, and ends with its central character being far more somber, if also wiser. Strategically set in 2011 before a major historical event, this tale of a young woman who finds some missing part of her identity by immersing herself in a foreign culture stars Pauline Etienne as 20-

year-old Amélie, a pixie-ish, French-language Belgian tutor born in Tokyo who is now returning as an ardent Japanophile. Hooked on the country's glitzy zeitgeist and youth culture, Amélie slowly learns of much deeper traditions and complexities when she falls for handsome student Rinri (Taichi Inoue). Initially giddy over their new relationship, Amélie eventually realizes that Rinri—like many Japanese men—is slow to fully reveal his inner self. Writer-director Stefan Liberski does a masterful job of modulating the film's energy, from an initial playfulness and joy to a far heavier sense of polarization that is made far worse by the Fukushima disaster. Etienne and Inoue are both very good as budding adults who have yet to find their bearings in a world of hard distinctions and consequences. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



Tokyo Tribe ★★½

XLrator, 117 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$14.99, Blu-ray: \$20.99

Adapted from a graphic novel series, Japanese cult director Sion Sono's *Tokyo Tribe* is a gang war thriller set in an alternate future as a hip-hopera musical. It opens with a rapping narrator delivering exposition on a busy, stylized studio street set—Tokyo, divided into districts run by different gangs in a wary state of détente—and never leaves the perpetual night of this studio-created city. Each gang sports its own tribal look and has its own district but the peace is broken when a Yakuza-like faction led by the bloodthirsty and perverted Lord Buppa (played by cult actor Riki Takeuchi) decides to wipe out every other gang and take over Tokyo for himself and his decadent son (who forces captives to serve as living furniture). Also on hand are a beat-boxing personal servant, a pair of kung-fu siblings, references to *Scarface*, Bruce Lee, and *Kill Bill*, and the most literal use of penis envy as motivation I've ever witnessed in a film. Packed with movement and color, *Tokyo Tribe* is a big, busy mess that is more overwhelming than thrilling or engaging, featuring extreme violence and purely gratuitous nudity. Which is not to say that it isn't often entertaining—it is. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)



Top Spin ★★★

First Run, 81 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95

Ping pong is a game you play with your cousins at bi-annual family reunions, or during beery evenings at the corner tavern. Table tennis might be a fancier name, but it is



also an Olympics-level sport not meant for ordinary mortals—it can leave your head spinning, although it also looks as if it could put your eye out. The subjects of this documentary are both ordinary and remarkable: American teens studying for the SAT, who consult with their guidance counselor at school, and try to make time for friends in their busy schedules, which include up to six hours a day rigorously practicing table tennis, in preparation for various pre-qualifying competitions for making the U.S. Olympics team in 2012. Directors Sara Newens and Mina T. Son focus on three kids—Michael Landers, Lily Zhang, and Ariel Hsing—who carry an enormous weight of expectation on their young shoulders. Viewers witness the passionate involvement of parents and coaches, as well as Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, who turn up in a comical moment of support. The action in *Top Spin* is sizzling, featuring lightning-fast exchanges between competitors that look unearthly. But in the end, table tennis is all too human, and the final lesson from competing is that success can be defined in different ways, from fulfillment, to peace of mind, to finding new dreams. An engaging sports documentary, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)

Trumbo ★★★½

Universal, 125 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98,

In the late 1940s and early '50s, Hollywood was terrorized by Sen. Joseph McCarthy and his House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Encouraged by judgmental patriot John Wayne (David James Elliott) and vicious gossip columnist Hedda Hopper (Helen Mirren), HUAC—chaired by J. Parnell Thomas (James DuMont)—subpoenaed "suspicious" citizens, asking them: "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" A primary target was Hollywood's highest-paid screenwriter, Dalton Trumbo (Bryan Cranston), whose mockery of the committee landed him in jail, convicted of contempt of Congress. Trumbo led the "Hollywood Ten," who found themselves blacklisted, unable to work. While others fled overseas, Trumbo refused to leave. Instead, he adopted pseudonyms while writing scripts that included *Roman Holiday* and *The Brave One*, both of which won Oscars for Best Original Screenplay. While most of Trumbo's work was for schlocky B-picture mogul Frank King (John Goodman), eventually Stanley Kubrick and Otto Preminger would give Trumbo credit for *Spartacus* and *Exodus*, respectively. Habitually writing in the bathtub with a long-stemmed cigarette holder clenched between his teeth and a tumbler of Scotch at his side, Trumbo—with Oscar-nominee Cranston superb as the highly-principled idealist—is supported by his loyal



wife (Diane Lane) and activist daughter (Elle Fanning). The strong ensemble cast also includes comedian Louis C.K. as cynical Arlen Hird (a composite of several screenwriters), Michael Stuhlbarg as enigmatic Edward G. Robinson, and Dean O'Gorman as outspoken Kirk Douglas. Along the way, director Jay Roach astutely utilizes archival footage and re-creates newsreels while illuminating one of the most shameful periods in Hollywood history. Highly recommended. (S. Granger)

Truth ★★★★★

Sony, 125 min., R, DVD: \$26.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99

Truth examines the scandal that erupted after CBS *Nightly News* anchor Dan Rather ran a 60 Minutes segment asserting that President George W. Bush used family connections to avoid Vietnam combat and never fulfilled his Texas Air National Guard obligations. If this report had not been discredited, it might conceivably have tipped the 2004 Presidential election to Democrat John Kerry. When I was studying journalism under Pierre Salinger, he insisted that controversial stories be corroborated by two independent sources. But what if those sources lie? This is exactly what happened to Mary Mapes (Cate Blanchett), Rather's (Robert Redford) long-time producer. Responsible for finding and scrutinizing stories, Mapes is curious about the Bush allegations, and—encouraged by CBS News president Andrew Heyward (Bruce Greenwood)—she assembles an investigative team (Dennis Quaid, Elisabeth Moss, Topher Grace). Rushed due to an early air-date, their reporting—which may have been accurate—nevertheless contains journalistic flaws and relies on an erratic source (Stacy Keach). Even today, basic questions have still not been answered: namely, how did Bush get into the Guard and why was he excused from duty? Based on Mapes's 2005 book *Truth and Duty: The Press, The President, and the Privilege of Power*, filmmaker James Vanderbilt's *Truth* offers a layered and detailed condemnation of contemporary journalism, illustrating how Internet obsession with minutia/gossip has often obscured the bigger picture. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. (S. Granger)



Uncle John ★★★

Kino Lorber, 114 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95

Although John Ashton is best known for supporting turns in '80s action comedies like *Beverly Hills Cop*, he's enjoyed a career in movies and TV for more than 40 years, and has the rare opportunity to shine in a lead role in this odd but fascinating combination of melodrama and romantic comedy from director Steven Piet. Ashton is excellent as



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John, an aging handyman liked by everybody in his small Wisconsin town. But John might have killed a fellow named Dutch (Laurent Soucie), a bully who had recently turned over a new leaf and begun confessing his past misdeeds. Dutch's angry brother, Danny (Ronnie Gene Blevins), certainly begins to suspect that John is responsible for Dutch's disappearance. That story, however, alternates with another that initially seems entirely separate—a good-natured romance between Ben (Alex Moffat) and Kate (Jenna Lyng), co-workers at a Chicago graphics firm. The two narrative strands come together when the young couple decides to visit the uncle who brought Ben up—John. And during their stay, Danny decides it's time to take his vengeance on the man he believes killed his brother. A slow-burning thriller that ultimately pays off in unexpected ways, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Unleashed! A Dog Dancing Story ★★★

Virgil, 81 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99

The synopsis of *Unleashed! A Dog Dancing Story* reads like it was ripped directly from the Christopher Guest playbook. Filmmaker Justin Turcotte's spirited Canadian documentary follows an amateur dog dancing company from British Columbia that is headed up by a self-styled theatre director, as they attempt to mount an elaborate musical production that melds canine choreography with indoor kite flying. Yes, that's correct: dogs dancing on stage with their handlers...surrounded by kite fliers. The film charts the two-year process of prepping the show for the stage, interweaving behind-the-scenes drama with the stories of the dog dancers, most of whom discovered the activity in retirement. Dog dancing is a serious pastime for its participants, many of whom have invested years of their lives training their dogs to dance with them. The documentary presents its subject with due respect and no condescension, although the machinations behind the stage production—a bizarre, costumed *Lord of the Rings*-ish fantasy epic—do devolve into unintended comedy on occasion as the players and their dogs learn moves while under the gun. A heartening film that shines a spotlight on the love and intimate bonds that allow a unique group of owners and their pets to move as one, this is recommended. (P. Morehart)



Xenia ★★★

Strand, 128 min., in Greek w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99

A big hit on the film festival circuit, Greek director Panos H. Koutras's drama *Xenia* centers on head-



strong, erratic Dany (Kostas Nikouli), a gay teen whose dissolute Albanian mother has just died. Living in Crete, Dany sets off to find his older brother, Ody—short for Odysseus (Nikos Gelias)—in Athens to give him the bad news. Their dysfunctional mother failed to secure the boys' legal residency in the country, and with their Greek father long since vanished, Ody and Dany are essentially stateless. Together, the pair embark on a journey to find their father, hoping to make him acknowledge their existence and give them money and resources. Along the way, the siblings run into problems with both the police and Greek nationalists who assault non-Greeks in the streets. Dany, while charismatic, proves even more unstable when he gets hold of a gun, and his relationship with a pet rabbit proves to be not quite what it seems (the rabbit later shows up as a talking giant in a couple of magical-realism scenes). Along the way, there are beautiful moments, such as a wondrous sequence in which a sleeping Dany and Ody float downriver on a stolen boat, witnessed by every kind of fairy-tale forest creature. All of this points toward a confrontation between the brothers and a man who may or may not be their father. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Youth ★★★

Fox, 124 min., R, Blu-ray: \$39.99, Mar. 1

Italian director Paolo Sorrentino's *Youth*, set in a sumptuous Alpine spa, serves up a rambling tale revolving around Fred Ballinger (Michael Caine), a retired British composer/conductor, and his longtime pal, American screenwriter/director Mick Boyle (Harvey Keitel). Fred is accompanied by his neurotic daughter, Lena (Rachel Weisz), while Mick struggles with his next script, attended by several sycophants. Relationships get strained when Lena's feckless husband (Ed Stoppard), who happens to be Mick's son, leaves her for sexy British pop star Paloma Faith (playing herself). As Fred and Mick playfully ponder their prostates, respective legacies, and womanizing pasts, they are surrounded by attentive staff and other guests, including a self-absorbed actor (Paul Dano), an obese former soccer star (Roly Serrano), a lovelorn mountaineering instructor (Robert Seethaler), and voluptuous Miss Universe (Madalina Ghenea), who strolls around unabashedly in the nude. When Queen Elizabeth II's emissary (Alex MacQueen) arrives to invite Fred to conduct a Royal Concert of an early composition, the summons triggers melancholy memories. And then Mick is stunned by a disquieting visit from his eccentric, bitter cinematic muse, Brenda (Jane Fonda). Caine and Keitel deliver subtle, multi-layered performances—among the best of their respective careers—in this film



that offers an empathetic meditation on the human spirit. Recommended. (S. Granger)

Classic Films

Burroughs: The Movie

★★★

Criterion, 90 min., not rated, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95



Beat Generation author William S. Burroughs (1914-1997) was a lifelong drug addict who incorporated his own experiences and drug-induced visions into his work, which included underground classics such as *Junkie* and *Naked Lunch* (the latter adapted into a film by David Cronenberg). When filmmaker Howard Brookner released this documentary in 1983, following five years of conducting interviews with Burroughs and various friends, colleagues, and fans (including Allen Ginsberg, Terry Southern, and Patti Smith), Burroughs's legacy was in the midst of a resurgence. Burroughs himself dominates and shapes this film with his sardonic commentary, reading excerpts of his work and even acting out scenes from his novels in odd mini-movies—all with his distinctive nasal drone and deadpan expression (which bring an oddly animated quality to his delivery). *Burroughs* is more memoir than biography, which is both the film's strength and weakness—emerging as a rare literary documentary in which the indulged subject works very closely with the filmmaker. Burroughs's first-person account provides insight into the artist and his life, including an account of his homosexual experiences that made him an early outspoken queer icon, a figure who defied the gay stereotypes of the era. Released to art cinemas in 1983, *Burroughs* was then lost for decades until it was rediscovered, restored, and re-released theatrically in 2014. Shot on 16mm, the film's coarse visual quality is preserved in this digital restoration, and is presented with extras including audio commentary by filmmaker Jim Jarmusch, new and archival interviews, outtakes, footage from the 2014 premiere of the film's restoration, and a short experimental 1981 edit of the film. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Chaplin's Essanay Comedies 1915 ★★★1/2

Flicker Alley, 5 discs, 405 min., not rated, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$59.95



In 1914, Charlie Chaplin was lured away from Keystone Studios by Essanay with a huge increase in salary and the promise of creative freedom. Chaplin made the most of it with 14 official (and one unofficial) short films produced in 1915. The early films (*His New Job* and *A Night Out* with Ben

Turpin; *The Champion* and *In the Park* with Edna Purviance, his leading lady in all subsequent shorts) are steeped in the Keystone tradition of pratfalls and well-placed kicks to the rear end, but you can see the Tramp persona develop through the films and mature in *The Tramp* and *The Bank*, which combine pathos and slapstick in a manner that defines Chaplin's greatest comedies. By the end of his stint at Essanay, Chaplin is in top form with *Shanghai'd*, a stowaway farce on a boat; *A Night at the Show*, playing both a drunk dandy and a working class rube wreaking havoc at a vaudeville show; *A Burlesque on Carmen*, which spoofs the classic opera; and *Police*, in which the Tramp leaves prison to enter a world of rampant poverty and crime (portrayed by Chaplin with a cynical, satiric eye—yet also heartened with hope). This collection of newly restored films not only shows Chaplin's evolution as a performer and a filmmaker during his greatest period of growth but also represents a vital chapter in the development of silent comedy and film history. Extras include the bonus shorts *Triple Trouble* and *A Night Out* (both constructed from Chaplin outtakes), and a booklet with behind-the-scenes images and an essay by film historian Jeffrey Vance. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

A Child Is Waiting

★★★

Kino Lorber, 102 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

John Cassavetes was one of the pioneers of American independent cinema, directing important, emotionally-charged, impeccably-acted films on limited budgets outside of the mainstream studio system. That said, Cassavetes also worked within the system both as an actor and director (using the money to finance personal projects), serving as director on 1963's *A Child Is Waiting*, a sober drama with an impressive pedigree that included Stanley Kramer as producer and Abby Mann as screenwriter, along with stars Judy Garland and Burt Lancaster. Garland plays Jean Hansen, a new hire at an institution for mentally disabled children, who clashes with the institution's head, Dr. Matthew Clark (Lancaster), over the treatment of a particular child. The film could have slipped into obscurity as just another standard social issue melodrama, but the acting lifts the material, and Cassavetes's preference for improvised performances brings a realism that would have been lost in rote line readings. Clashes with Kramer led Cassavetes to disown the film, but *A Child Is*



Waiting remains a fascinating entry in the auteur's filmography. Extras include an audio commentary by film historian Tom Charity. Recommended. (P. Morehart)

Comin' at Ya! ★★★1/2

MVD Entertainment Group, 91 min., R, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.95

The 3D format was a half-forgotten novelty by the time this 1981 low-budget Western resurrected it, achieving surprising box office success. But while the film deserves credit for restoring the reputation of then-much-maligned 3D, *Comin' at Ya!* is not exactly classic cinema. The brainchild of two spaghetti Western veterans—director Ferdinando Baldi and actor/producer Tony Anthony—the story follows newly married H.H. Hart (Anthony), whose bride has been kidnapped by a pair of criminal brothers operating a white slavery business. Hart embarks on a quest to find his kidnapped wife, which involves the usual amount of B-Western mayhem. Throughout, the viewer is assaulted with an endless stream of objects that are thrust directly at the camera: coins, a yo-yo, a bowling ball, a snake, flames, and even a bare-bottomed baby—all meant to exploit the 3D experi-



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ence. But what might be amusing for a few minutes eventually becomes something of an endurance test—a particularly pointless one for those who watch the 2D DVD release. The 3D Blu-ray (featuring a frame by frame digital conversion of the polarized over-and-under format of the original 3D release) at least showcases the film's chief claim to fame, but viewers will need to have a 3D TV to enjoy it. Optional. (P. Hall)

Deep in My Heart ★★

Warner, 132 min., not rated,
Blu-ray: \$21.99



MGM was the king of movie musicals during the 1940s and 1950s and one of their specialties was the musical biopic celebrating great songwriters, a formula that guaranteed an excellent soundtrack and all of the production numbers that could be squeezed in. After tackling the likes of George M. Cohan (*Yankee Doodle Dandy*) and Rodgers and Hart (*Words and Music*), MGM turned to Sigmund Romberg—a classically-trained composer who became a success composing songs for Broadway musical revues and operettas produced by the Shubert brothers—for this highly fictionalized portrait. Jose Ferrer—not known for comedy or singing—acquits himself well as the Hungarian-born but American-raised Romberg, displaying uncharacteristic energy and comic chops when he does an entire show in digest form, performing all of the parts (singing and dancing) and even providing pratfalls. The romanticized story, however, is basically just a framework for Romberg's songs from shows such as *Maytime*, *The Student Prince*, and *The New Moon*, many of which are performed in colorful production numbers by MGM's stable of musical stars, including Rosemary Clooney, Jane Powell, Vic Damone, Ann Miller, Cyd Charisse, Howard Keel, Tony Martin, and Gene Kelly (appearing with his brother Fred Kelly in the latter's only credited film role). Although it doesn't rank among the great MGM musicals, this one is snappy and fun (thanks in part to director Stanley Donen) and features 22 classic songs, along with a great cast. Extras include outtakes from three unused songs, plus the 1954 Oscar-nominated short *The Strauss Fantasy*, and an archival cartoon. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The End ★★

Olive, 101 min., R, Blu-ray:
\$29.95



At the height of his Hollywood stardom in 1978, Burt Reynolds directed and starred in this atypical gallops sitcom-style movie. The result, unfortunately, is more of the funny-peculiar kind than funny-ha-ha. Reynolds stars as Sonny, a philandering,

shady Southern California realtor who is shaken by a diagnosis of a leukemia-type terminal illness. Given mere months to live, a panicked Sonny awkwardly turns to religion, sex (Reynolds' real-life then-girlfriend Sally Field portrays the anti-hero's cat-hoarding mistress) and, finally, attempted suicide. The latter antic lands him in a mental hospital, where Sonny finds a sympathetic but bumbling loon (Dom DeLuise) willing to murder him. Lots of familiar faces (Carl Reiner, Myrna Loy, Norman Fell, Joanne Woodward, Kristy McNichol, Robby Benson) drift through this sketch-like scenario, at least giving this aimless farce some nostalgic value. Optional. (C. Cassidy)

Ghost Story ★★

Scream Factory, 110 min., R,
Blu-ray: \$29.99



Based on the 1979 bestselling novel by Peter Straub, 1981's *Ghost Story* shines a spotlight on famed movie stars Fred Astaire, Melvyn Douglas, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and John Houseman, playing old friends who gather to tell each other ghost stories—until a specter from their past comes into their lives. They are haunted by a young woman (Alice Krige) who first targets the sons of Douglas, and then the elderly gents themselves, taking vengeance for a horrible crime that they committed and covered up decades before. Fittingly, much of the film takes place in flashbacks, as stories told to one another after a surviving son (Craig Wasson) appears with his own story of a fiancée with a cold heart. Director John Irvin creates a handsome film set in a snowy New England winter that could be a Christmas card cover (thanks to Oscar-winning cinematographer Jack Cardiff), and the four Hollywood veterans bring a touch of class to their performances. But the long flashbacks drag on, dissipating the narrative's mystery and suspense. And while it does play mostly like an old-fashioned horror film, there are brief moments of gruesome special effects (such as a beautiful woman suddenly becoming a rotting corpse). Extras include audio commentary by Irvin, and cast and crew interviews. Optional. (S. Axmaker)

Ikiru ★★½

Criterion, 143 min., in
Japanese w/English subtitles,
not rated, DVD: 2 discs,
\$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95



Ikiru, which translates as "To Live," is one of legendary Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa's most emotionally powerful and intimate dramas. Takashi Shimura (the lead samurai in *Seven Samurai*) stars as Kanji Watanabe, a widower single father and political bureaucrat who discovers that he has stomach cancer and realizes

that he has wasted his life keeping busy in a largely meaningless job. After 25 years of punctuality and impersonal interactions with a staff who think of him as a dull, emotionless functionary (one young employee nicknames him "The Mummy"), Watanabe suddenly drops out, trying to deaden the fear though drinking and clubbing, and then becomes inspired to accomplish something meaningful during his final days. The film is split into two parts, with the second jumping ahead to Watanabe's wake, where co-workers toast the man and a memorable late-life achievement. Flashbacks punctuate the narrative, ranging from Watanabe's memories of how he reached his current state of apathy, to co-workers recalling the sudden passion and humility of Watanabe's last months. Presented with a new restored digital transfer, extras include audio commentary by film critic Stephen Prince, and two documentaries on Kurosawa. A beautiful, touching film that is one of Kurosawa's best-loved, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Julien Duvivier in the Thirties ★★

Criterion, 4 discs, 410 min., in
French w/English subtitles, not
rated, DVD: \$59.95



Julien Duvivier was once a giant of French cinema but his reputation declined late in his career. This boxed set of four standout films that Duvivier made with actor Harry Baur shows he was a versatile filmmaker who found innovative and expressive ways to tell moving and entertaining stories. *David Golder* (1930)—a drama about a ruthless banker with a spoiled family—is Duvivier's debut sound film, and he creatively uses the new cinematic dimension right from the opening scenes. *Poil de Carotte* (1932), which translates to "Carrot Top," mixes comedy and tragedy to tell the story of a sweet, imaginative young boy whose generous spirit is constantly smothered by a neglectful family. *La Tête d'un Homme* (1933) stars Baur as Georges Simenon's Inspector Maigret in an inventively-directed mystery that is part police procedural and part battle of wits with an arrogant young killer. Finally, *Un Carnet de Bal* (1937), the tale of a recently widowed heiress who tracks down the young men who courted her 20 years ago at her first society ball, is one of the director's most beloved films, serving up a melancholy meditation on memory, loss, and disappointment (along with Baur, it also features French greats Fernandel, Louis Jouvet, and Raimu). These black-and-white films show some signs of wear and damage, but all have been well-mastered from archival sources. Part of the Criterion Collection's extra-less Eclipse line, this set is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

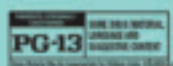


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Maggie, a single mother from New York City, embarks on a journey to a Tuscan village in an effort to reconnect with her rebellious teenage daughter, Summer. Upon arrival, Maggie runs into Luca, her handsome ex-boyfriend living with his eighty-year-old mother, Carmen. When Summer and Carmen impulsively steal Luca's car and race off to Rome, the former lovers quickly pursue, allowing them to develop a new understanding of each other.

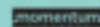


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Lost Lost Lost & Walden: Two Diary Films by Jonas Mekas ★★★

Kino Lorber, 2 discs, 350 min.,
not rated, Blu-ray: \$44.95



This compilation offers a very generous introduction to the work of Jonas Mekas, one of the most important figures in the American experimental film scene, who wrote about cinema in media outlets such as *The Village Voice* during the 1960s and in 1964 co-founded the Film-makers' Cinemathèque, forerunner of New York's Anthology Film Archives—a major repository of avant-garde films. Mekas also began making films of his own, including brief autobiographical entries for a series he dubbed "Diaries, Notes and Sketches," which he collected into compilations called "Diary Films." Two of these form the bulk of this set: *Walden* (1969) covers the years 1964-68 in roughly chronological order and includes shots of family celebrations and encounters with a wide variety of notables; *Lost Lost Lost* (1976) collects material from Mekas's experiences with his younger brother Adolfas in the '50s and early '60s as they settled first into a Lithuanian community in Brooklyn, then moved to the East Village, and finally decamped to Vermont for a film project. *Walden* has been available previously on DVD before (see review in VL-11/09), but *Lost Lost Lost* is making its premiere on disc. The impressive extras include audio commentary on both films by Mekas, six of Mekas's short films, and Gideon Bachmann's *Jonas* (1968), in which Mekas walks around the city and talks about filmmaking, as well as a booklet with an essay by film critic Ed Halter. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Paolo Gioli: The Complete Filmworks

★★★1/2

Raro, 3 discs, 561 min., in
Italian w/English subtitles, not
rated, DVD: \$29.95



The work of Paolo Gioli, a septuagenarian Italian experimental filmmaker, is in some respects comparable to that of Stan Brakhage and Bill Morrison in its use of distressed footage, montages of archival clips, artwork, animated images, and splashes of moving patterns across the screen. But his work is also different enough to present a distinctive voice, and this collection offers an excellent introduction, compiling all 38 of Gioli's films (varying from three to 42 minutes in length) dating from 1969 to 2013. The films are divided into nine categories representing different techniques—one grouping includes three hand-painted animated films, another consists of compilations of found footage, a third utilizes stroboscopic technology, and so forth. Extras include Patrick A. Rumble's *Film*

Liberi in Libertà, which is essentially a long monologue by Gioli with illustrative film clips; Paolo Vampa and Giovanni Cappello's *Rosso di Landi*, in which Gioli replicates experiments from Polaroid founder Edwin Land that formed the basis of his theories on color vision; and a lavishly illustrated booklet. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Passage to Marseilles

★★★

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



Humphrey Bogart headlines this 1944 wartime drama, reuniting with his *Casablanca* director Michael Curtiz and costars Claude Rains, Sydney Greenstreet, and Peter Lorre in a production that packs several genres into a single film. Opening on an Air Force squadron of Free French fighters hidden in the countryside, *Passage to Marseilles* segues into a sea drama, a prison escape thriller, a war movie, and even features a deck brawl that echoes a pirate clash, all nestled into the main storyline through flashbacks and plot twists. Bogart's story takes him to pre-war Marseilles, where his crusading newspaper publisher is framed for murder by the Fascists, and to Devil's Island where he meets his fellow patriots. This is shameless wartime propaganda, a rousing call to arms to free Europe from the Nazis and turncoat collaborators (all presented as martinets with Fascist sympathies), but it is also action-packed and enormously entertaining. And Curtiz and cinematographer James Wong Howe beautifully create the locations—from Devil's Island to a cargo freighter on the high seas—entirely in the studio. Extras include the Oscar-nominated short "Jammin' the Blues" featuring Lester Young, a "Night at the Movies" collection (featuring a newsreel, short subject, cartoon, and trailers from 1944), and a Warner Bros. studio blooper reel. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Pauline at the Beach

★★★

Kino Lorber, 94 min., in French
w/English subtitles, R, DVD:
\$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95



After completing his "Six Moral Tales" series (plus a pair of literary period pieces), French filmmaker Éric Rohmer embarked on "Comedies and Proverbs," a set of female-driven romantic comedies featuring headstrong characters, mismatched couples, and crisscrossing plots characteristic of Shakespearean farce. While many of Rohmer's films could be described as intellectual sex comedies without the sex, *Pauline at the Beach* (1983) embraces the earthy passion of sexual play as seen from the perspective of 15-year-old Pauline (Amanda Langlet), who gets an eye-opening lesson in the games grown-ups

play during a two-week summer vacation with her recently divorced older cousin Marion (Arielle Dombasle, a vivacious blonde goddess). Marion's smitten ex-lover Pierre (Pascal Greggory) turns aggressive with jealousy when smooth, seductive, and happily shallow writer Henri (Féodor Atkine) wins the fancy of the "perfect" Marion while continuing to fool around on the side. The tangled affairs, mistaken identities, and white lies are the stuff of sex farce, but Rohmer—true to form—doesn't judge, remaining more interested in the follies of love and the impulsive, illogical workings of human nature. Rohmer deftly crafts a gentle and sexy human comedy in which Pauline may learn the right lessons after all. Extras include a 1996 interview with Rohmer. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Pitfall ★★★

Kino Lorber, 86 min., not rated,
DVD: \$17.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95



Dick Powell, a light romantic leading man of numerous 1930s musicals, re-defined himself in the 1940s as a weary, witty tough guy in a series of lean crime thrillers that we now call (in hindsight) film noir. In fact, the genre was such a good fit that Powell decided to develop his own projects. The 1948 film *Pitfall* was the first of his independently produced features and one of the most adult and underappreciated film noir entries. Powell stars as middle-class insurance man John Forbes, a white-collar husband and father living in suburbia who is bored with the routine of his life. Forbes winds up in what looks like an affair with a model (smoky-voiced Lizbeth Scott) who received stolen property from an embezzling banker. Afternoon meetings in dive bars ensue, as do fights with a seedy private detective (Raymond Burr at his sleaziest) who becomes obsessed with the model, and the shadows of Forbes's city sins follow him home. Director André De Toth, who brought a hard edge to his work, focuses here more on consequences and responsibility than the spectacle of violence. And while some scenes play out memorably in the dark of night—with slashes of light picking the players out of the shadows as in any great noir—much of the film takes place in the light of day in familiar settings: home, office, and the busy streets of Los Angeles, placing the drama in the world of everyday people. Extras include an audio commentary by film noir historian Eddie Muller. A rediscovered classic recently restored by UCLA Film & Television Archive and The Film Noir Foundation, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Speedy ★★★

Criterion, 86 min., not rated, DVD: 2 discs,
\$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95

Harold Lloyd was the modern urban young man of silent movie comedy, a smart-aleck

with a spirited personality and wily ingenuity that constantly landed him in trouble but also helped him through seemingly insurmountable challenges. In *Speedy*, his final silent film, Lloyd faces the task of saving his sweetheart's crusty old grandfather's streetcar line from unscrupulous businessmen. Lloyd plays Harold "Speedy" Swift, a spirited New Yorker who sabotages his big ideas and grand dreams with his passion for baseball—until he's called to drive a horse-drawn streetcar across New York City, a sequence that features Lloyd's trademark stunt comedy as he dodges traffic, electric streetcars, and bystanders. Lloyd shot key scenes on location, including a trip to Coney Island where he and his girlfriend (Ann Christy) sample the rides and midway attractions. And Babe Ruth plays himself, bouncing around in the back of Lloyd's taxi cab while rushing to make a baseball game on time. Lloyd was a careful steward of his films, overseeing all of his productions, and here he and director Ted Wilde keep the aptly-named film running at a rapid pace that builds towards a climactic race against time. Presented with a new digital restoration, extras include an audio commentary by New York's Film Forum's



Bruce Goldstein and Turner Classic Movies' Scott McGee, a retrospective featurette, Lloyd home movies, the newly restored 1919 Lloyd two-reeler "Bumping into Broadway," and archival footage of Ruth. A fine classic silent comedy, this is recommended. (S. Axmayer)

Twice Told Tales ★★

Kino Lorber, 120 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

The success of American International's string of Edgar Allan Poe-inspired movies starring Vincent Price in the early 1960s led to this 1963 attempt to repeat the formula using stories by Nathaniel Hawthorne. *Twice Told Tales* is an anthology very loosely based on three tales, only one of which—"Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," a fountain of youth story—actually appeared in the titular Hawthorne collection. The second, "Rappacini's Daughter," centers on a botanist who creates poisonous plants that affect his daughter's ability to interact with her suitor, and the third is a much slimmed-down version of Hawthorne's novel *The House of the Seven Gables*, about a ne'er-do-well out to claim the haunted mansion his family stole from its rightful owners. Price hams it up mercilessly as the villain in each

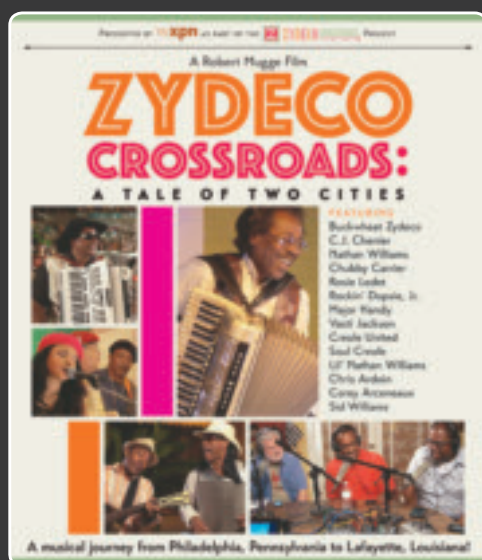


tale, but while the cast also includes such stalwarts as Sebastian Cabot, Brett Halsey, Richard Denning, and Beverly Garland, the direction by Sidney Salkow is plodding, and the threadbare production values are only negatively accentuated by the luridly colorful cinematography (the collapse of the house in *Gables* is laughably chintzy, with the same papier-mâché pillar repeatedly falling down). Extras include a pedantic audio commentary by film historians Richard Harland Smith and Perry Martin, and an interview with filmmaker Mick Garris. Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

The Undesirable ★★1/2

Olive, 66 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

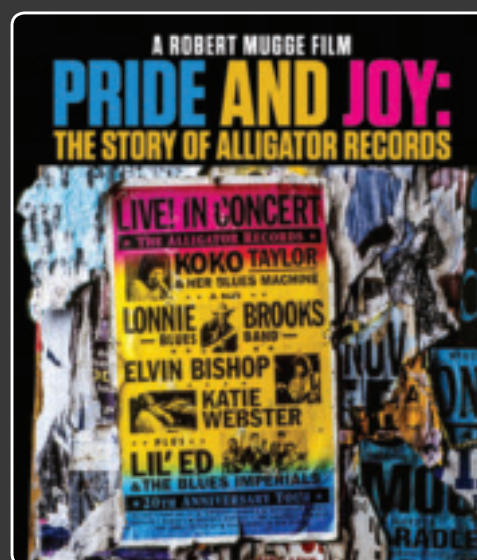
Produced in Hungary in 1914, *The Undesirable* is the kind of hoary but lively melodrama readily associated with early cinema. Adapted from a stage play, the story concerns Betty (Lili Berkly), a young woman who upon the death of her father learns that he was actually her uncle, a man who adopted Betty after her mother killed her real father—a violent brute. With her entire life upended, Betty lands a job as a maid to a rich couple, only to be accused of a crime



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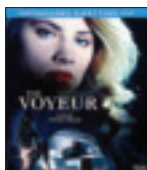
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she didn't commit, while her mother, freed after serving a 15-year prison sentence, goes off in search of her. *The Undesirable* serves up star-crossed romance, mistaken identity, arrogance, prejudice, and tragedy while on the way to a happy ending. It's also utterly silly and quite naïve—compared to films being made in the U.S. and Western Europe at the time—but still a curious time capsule, as well as one of the first films by Mihály Kertész, who would go to Hollywood and change his name to Michael Curtiz, later directing *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *Casablanca*, and *Mildred Pierce*, among other classics. Long believed lost, a print was discovered in a New York City basement and repatriated to Hungary, where it was restored and given a superb new musical score by composer Attila Pacsay. Although hardly a lost masterpiece, *The Undesirable* is an interesting artifact from a country whose silent film legacy is not well represented. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmayer)

The Voyeur ★★1/2

Cult Epics, 104 min., in English & Italian w/English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray: \$29.95



Falling somewhere between soft- and hardcore porn, the movies of prolific director Tinto Brass feature plenty of titillation, but also strive for an arty look. *The Voyeur* (1994) boasts a distinguished pedigree, being based on a novel by Alberto Moravia (the credits make no mention of this fact since the author's estate deemed the film unworthy of bearing his name). This adaptation does retain something of its source's main theme of alienation, but mostly it's concerned with fairly explicit exhibitions of the human anatomy engaged in sexual activity, some involving obviously artificial enhancement (the Italian penchant for prosthetic penises). The story focuses on Eduardo (Francesco Casale), a literature professor whose wife Sylvia (Katarina Vasilissa) has left him, although she visits periodically for amorous interludes. Eduardo watches with envy as those around him—his students, the general public—enjoy the sensual pleasures he longs for. Eduardo also spends time with his wealthy father—bedridden after an accident—who is ministered to by a beautiful nurse in ways that reveal the old man's prodigious equipment. In narrative terms, *The Voyeur* is about Eduardo's struggle to understand the reason that his wife abandoned him, but this is mostly an excuse for Brass to serve up shots of breasts, buttocks and genitalia—albeit presented in gorgeous, lush, widescreen color cinematography complemented by a bubbly music score. Extras include an interview with Brass, and a photo gallery. While not for all tastes, *The Voyeur* is a solid example of '90s art erotica and should be considered a strong optional

purchase for more adventurous collections. (F. Swietek)

What Have You Done to Solange? ★★

Arrow, 107 min., in Italian & English w/English subtitles, R, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.95



An Italian thriller set at a private girls school in Britain where teenage girls are being brutally killed in a sexually violent manner, this cult film stars Fabio Testi as Enrico "Henry" Roseni, an Italian physical education teacher (engaged in an affair with one of the students) who becomes a prime suspect and is forced to turn detective with his wife (Karin Baal) to find the real killer. This 1972 film is considered a classic of the Italian horror genre known as giallo, which distinctively combined brutal murders (mostly against women), mysterious killers (usually in disguise), and (at its best) creatively choreographed spectacles of violence. For all the characteristic sloppiness of the screenplay, this film remains unusual and surprising, with some well-directed murder scenes and startling imagery. It is also shamelessly salacious in its exploitation of girls as sexual objects and unsavory in that these minors are assaulted in a vicious, sadistic, and hateful manner by (no spoiler here) an adult male. The film ultimately explains the motivation for this particular brand of murder (which is terribly distasteful), but the extreme violence against young women makes it hard to enjoy. Extras include an audio commentary by film critics Alan Jones and Kim Newman, cast and crew interviews, and a video essay by giallo expert Michael Mackenzie. Optional. (S. Axmayer)

The Wind in the Willows ★★1/2

Warner, 95 min., not rated, DVD: \$17.99



Produced for TV by Jules Bass and Arthur Rankin Jr., this 1987 animated feature is a largely faithful adaptation of Kenneth Grahame's oft-filmed 1908 classic novel. Charles Nelson Reilly voices the obsessive Mr. Toad, who is so smitten with the modern new automobile that he keeps buying and smashing them with no regards to the consequences, while his friends Ratty (Roddy McDowall), Moley (Eddie Bracken), and the very private Badger (José Ferrer) stage a kind of intervention to curb his behavior before it can land him in serious trouble...which it finally does. Like most of the Rankin/Bass productions, *The Wind in the Willows* features big, broad characterizations, as well as bouncy (if ultimately unmemorable) songs, and solid hand-drawn animation. The designs of the animal characters are actually quite engaging (the humans less

so), while the scope of the action—featuring a riverboat, a locomotive chase, and an assault on Toad Hall by a gang of ill-behaved weasels—is wide-ranging. Although made for kids, this might seem flat and sluggish to children raised on Pixar and Disney features, but may well appeal to animation buffs and fans of the Rankin/Bass style. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmayer)

You Can't Take It With You ★★

Sony, 126 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$19.99



James Stewart and Jean Arthur star in Frank Capra's adaptation of the 1937 Pulitzer Prize-winning Broadway play by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman. The pair make a delightful romantic couple (and were reunited in Capra's next film, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*), while Lionel Barrymore costars as Alice Sycamore's (Arthur) wonderfully eccentric grandfather—the patriarch of a creative, crazy extended family (which includes Ann Miller, Spring Byington, and memorable character actors Donald Meek and Mischa Auer). Stewart plays Tony Kirby, the son of a businessman (Edward Arnold) who refuses to accept these addled free spirits as future in-laws. Capra directs the household scenes with high energy, creating spirited screwball comedy from their shenanigans, but he and screenwriter Robert Riskin replace the unhinged anarchy of the play with sentimental Capra-corn. Now, the story turns on a battle of wills between embrace-the-moment-everyman Barrymore and bitter king of capitalism Arnold, spending so much effort hammering home Capra's own populist point that it misses the spirit of the original material. The film won Best Picture and Best Director Oscars in 1938—Capra's third and final gold statue for directing—and it was a popular hit upon release, but it hasn't aged as well as Capra's superior films, including *It Happened One Night* and *It's a Wonderful Life*. Even so, the snappy dialogue, fine cast, and energetic direction still make this an entertaining film, one sure to appeal to fans of classic Hollywood comedies. Extras include audio commentary by Frank Capra Jr. and author Cathrine Kellison, and a retrospective featurette. Recommended. (S. Axmayer)

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12 Monkeys: Season One

★★★

Universal, 3 discs, 560 min., not rated, DVD: \$44.98, Blu-ray: \$49.98

This new series created for the Syfy channel is built on the 1995 sci-fi thriller directed by Terry Gilliam that starred Bruce Willis as a time-traveler from a post-apocalyptic future who is trying to stop a plague that will wipe out most of humanity. Aaron Stanford plays James Cole, the time-traveling agent from the future trying to locate the origins of the plague, and Amanda Schull costars as Dr. Cassandra Railly, a virologist who overcomes her skepticism and becomes his partner. The series opens much like the film, with our jittery hero tracking clues and landing in an asylum while trying to discover the meaning of the mysterious "Army of the 12 Monkeys," but then expands with new characters and a complicated conspiracy involving black ops labs, biological weapons, an ancient plague, and a mysterious assassin known as "The Witness" (Tom Noonan) who is determined to unleash a killer virus upon the world. *12 Monkeys* is part of the new wave of ambitious Syfy original shows, and it has fun playing with shifting timelines and conundrums, as well as a bleak future where marauding gangs prey upon survivors and sabotage the scientists (led by Barbara Sukowa) trying to save the past and change their present. Presenting all 13 episodes from the 2015 debut season, extras include deleted scenes, a gag reel, cast auditions, and webisodes. A well-executed series that bowed to good reviews and should interest sci-fi fans, this is recommended. (S. Axmayer)

**Agatha Christie's Partners in Crime**

★★★1/2

Acorn, 2 discs, 335 min., not rated, DVD or Blu-ray: \$39.99

More than 30 years after Tommy and Tuppence Beresford—Agatha Christie's husband-and-wife team of amateur detectives—first appeared on British TV, the characters have been revived for a new series. Jessica Raine is the adventurous Tuppence, while David Walliams is Tommy. In the opening episode, the pair are returning from France with a rare queen bee Tommy has purchased to start a beekeeping business. But en route they cross paths with a nervous young woman who hides secret documents in their luggage and then runs off, pursued by mysterious men. Tuppence is intrigued and drags Tommy into her investigation, which leads them into a nest of Communist spies, putting their lives in danger. Tommy's Uncle Carter (James Fleet), who is also a police inspector, first tries to dissuade them from their antics, then drafts Tommy to go undercover



for another mystery, while Tuppence, upset at being left out, follows him to conduct her own investigation. Matthew Steer costars as Albert, Tommy's war buddy scientist who helps out with forensic work. Christie purists may object to the comic emphasis and the contrivances tossed into the mysteries, but the characters are charismatic and fun and the shows are filled with marvelous 1950s detail. The series was not renewed, so—at least for now—this is the complete run. Compiling all six episodes from 2015, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, an interview with costar Clarke Peters, and a photo gallery. Likely to appeal to fans of light British mysteries, this is a strong optional purchase. (S. Axmayer)

Better Call Saul: Season One

★★★

Sony, 3 discs, 470 min., not rated, DVD: \$55.99, Blu-ray: \$65.99

Bob Odenkirk plays a struggling lawyer trying to get both respect and clients in Albuquerque, NM, in this prequel series to the award-winning *Breaking Bad*. Before he was shady lawyer Saul Goodman (Odenkirk), he was actually Jimmy McGill, a con-man (he earned the nickname Slippin' Jimmy) who cleaned up his act, obtained a law degree from a dubious school, and hung out his own shingle in a utility closet in the back of a strip mall beauty shop. *Better Call Saul*—from *Breaking Bad* creator Vince Gilligan—is a dark comedy that chronicles Jimmy's struggles as the younger brother of a once successful and respected lawyer (Michael McKean) who is now holed up with a phobia over electrical signals. Jimmy chases clients with more bravado than confidence and sees schemes backfire terribly before he finally lands a case that could make his reputation as well as his fortune. The series also introduces Mike Ehrmantraut (Jonathan Banks), the ex-cop who will become our anti-hero's reliable field man. Odenkirk is a mix of salesmanship and desperation as Jimmy/Saul, who isn't taken seriously by clients or other lawyers—a man with a needy soul under the pose, who would really like to play it straight and prove himself. *Better Call Saul* was nominated for seven Emmy Awards and Odenkirk earned Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild nominations. Presenting all 10 episodes from the 2015 first season, extras include episode commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, a gag reel, and a music video (exclusive to the Blu-ray release are additional featurettes, interviews, and deleted scenes). Recommended. (S. Axmayer)

**Downton Abbey: Season 6—The Final Season**

★★★★1/2

PBS, 3 discs, 540 min., not rated, DVD: \$49.99, Blu-ray: \$59.99

The BBC series *Downton Abbey* revived the

Upstairs Downstairs melodrama centering on families living on inherited wealth and the servants who work for them—presenting a portrait of a culture that was going extinct in the 1920s. The series was a phenomenon in both Britain and the U.S. (where it ranked as the most popular show on PBS), winning multiple Emmy Awards and Golden Globes over its first five seasons. There exists a kind of nostalgia for that kind of class system, at least as practiced by patriarch Lord Grantham (Hugh Bonneville) and his family, notably his more modern-thinking (but still class-conscious) daughter Lady Mary (Michelle Dockery), who are supported by the servants raised in this way of life, led by head butler Carson (Jim Carter). The sixth and final season of the series delivers happy endings all around, rewarding viewers for their devotion to the lives of the wealthy and the service classes alike. Tom (Allen Leach) returns to the family manor, marriages ensue (both among aristocrats and servants), and characters grow and learn as they witness the passing of an era (one family is forced to sell their manor, and the Crawleys open their home to visitors as a fundraiser). And cousin Rose (Lily James) comes back for the finale, while Maggie Smith continues to offer her hilariously withering commentary throughout as Violet Crawley, the Dowager Countess. Compiling all nine episodes from 2015 in their original U.K. versions, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Presenting a satisfying conclusion to a passionately embraced show, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmayer)

**Extant: The Second Season**

★★★

Paramount, 4 discs, 541 min., not rated, DVD: \$64.99, Blu-ray: \$76.99

In the second (and final) season of this ambitious sci-fi drama, astronaut Molly Woods (Halle Berry) has learned that her half-alien son (played by multiple actors as he grows) is a harbinger of Earth's destruction. Survival depends on her betraying both him and the government while also getting caught up in a conspiracy of inhuman origins. In addition to aliens, there are also "humanichs" on the prowl—robots that are indistinguishable from humans, which means there can be doppelgangers (a lazy plot device). Molly's husband (Goran Visnjic) only appears in the first episode, making way for a ruggedly sexy Jeffrey Dean Morgan as the new male lead, whose role as friend and foe in the government plot isn't quite clear. Molly's humanichs son (Pierce Gagnon) makes a welcome return, as does Grace Gummer as a rebel humanichs engineer. But this season's focus on a fugitive



Molly tracking down an alien being bogs down in formula narrative about machines taking over humanity, nanobot technology, shifting identities, and—groan—a magic amulet that will save the world. *Extant* still boasts big-budget production design and special effects, but the new direction for the story turned out to be a hard sell, and the show folded its tent. Presenting all 13 episodes from 2015, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, set tours, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Optional. (T. Fry)

Fear the Walking Dead: The Complete First Season ★★1/2

Anchor Bay, 2 discs, not rated, DVD: \$39.98, Blu-ray: \$49.99

From the creators of *The Walking Dead*, this prequel series is set in Los Angeles at the moment of the zombie plague outbreak. Kim Dickens stars as Madison Clark, a high school counselor and widow with two older children (one a drug addict dropout on the streets, the other a high school teenager), with Cliff Curtis costarring as Travis Manawa, a divorced father with a teenage boy he sees on weekends. Madison and Cliff are two adults living together and trying to make their mixed family work. As the plague spreads, so does panic, thanks to 24-hour news and social media reports of the infected biting innocent bystanders and getting up after being taken down by a hail of gunshots. The short six-episode season ends with the family getting out of the city and looking for sanctuary, essentially setting up the main series to come. But after five seasons of *The Walking Dead*, the learning curve of the human survivors here (who make the same mistakes) comes off as repetitive, and the new perspective doesn't add much urgency or tension. What the show does bring to the genre is an exploration of an extended family under pressure, hints of a military conspiracy as martial law takes over, and a general state of chaos as the unimaginable sweeps through a major metropolitan city. The massive popularity of the parent series will likely stir interest in this companion show. Compiling the brief 2015 debut season, extras include behind the scenes featurettes. A strong optional purchase. [Note: a Blu-ray "special edition" of the first season will bow March 22 with additional bonus features.] (S. Axmaker)



A French Village: Season 1 ★★1/2

MHz, 4 discs, 700 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$39.95

This French television series, broadcast stateside on MHz Choice, details life in a small village during the German occupation



in World War II. The pressures of war and the brutality of the German overlords take an emotional toll on the village residents, who find themselves slowly divided between those who collaborate with the occupiers (either willingly or otherwise) and those who engage in resistance (in both large and small ways). To its credit, the series is brutally honest in its exploration of the relative ease with which many French nationals found themselves working in alliance with their one-time enemy. And it also deserves praise for considering aspects of life during wartime often absent from many American productions concerning WWII, most notably in terms of food rationing and the efforts by the Germans to play their victims against each other. *A French Village* also boasts a handsome production design and vibrant visuals. Unfortunately, however, the series too often falls victim to soap opera-level plot devices, while the unusually large ensemble cast—which includes stars Audrey Fleurot and Thierry Godard—is variable in dramatic abilities. Compiling all six episodes from the 2009 first season, *A French Village*—despite its flaws—offers a compelling view of how the French see their tragic wartime history. A strong optional purchase. (P. Hall)

Getting On: The Complete Second Season ★★

HBO, 180 min., TV-MA, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Getting On is probably the least-known comedy show on a network famous for well-known, smart TV. The ratings weren't good enough for HBO to go beyond a just-wrapped third season, but there's plenty to enjoy in this brisk and darkly funny second season. The setting is the geriatric ward of a shabby Southern California hospital where nurses and a supervising doctor bicker back and forth and battle with patients and administrators, but also provide compassionate care that feels warmly authentic. The black humor is often based on the realities of end-of-life care, especially bodily functions and fluids. And while that may sound like a grim proposition, the writing and cast coalesce into an oft-hilarious comedy of human foibles. This season finds socially inept doctor Jenna James (Laurie Metcalf) in the doghouse for her questionable research studies and attempts at ersatz hospice care. Nurses Dawn (Alex Borstein) and Didi (Niecy Nash) are better friends, though still fumbling caregivers in spite of their humane attitudes. Sexually confused head nurse Patsy De La Serda (Mel Rodriguez) remains an enigma, friend, and thorn to most in his path. In addition to the strong ensemble, guests including Carrie Preston, Betty Buckley, Jean Smart, and Mary Kay Place kick up the funny conflict by several notches. It's not quite satire that



fuels the laughter, rather it's the realities of situations played for jokey pathos that makes *Getting On* such an offbeat delight. Presenting all six episodes from 2014, extras include deleted scenes and a gag reel. Recommended. (T. Fry)

Inside Amy Schumer: Season 3 ★★★

Paramount, 2 discs, 210 min., not rated, DVD: \$22.98

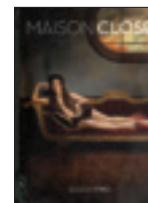
Amy Schumer's acclaimed Comedy Central skit show is guided by her raunchy style of humor and perspective on sexual politics. Each episode is loosely defined by a theme which runs through the sketches, interviews with people on the street, and clips from her standup comedy act. In its third season, the show leapt from cable hit to cultural phenomenon thanks to acclaimed pieces that went viral on YouTube. This is the season that satirized sexual double standards, with Tina Fey, Patricia Arquette, and Julia Louis-Dreyfus celebrating the latter's "Last F**kable Day," and also sexualized music videos with the song "Milk Milk Lemonade." The episode "12 Angry Men Inside Amy Schumer" parodied the famous movie, this time with an all-male jury (including Jeff Goldblum, John Hawkes, and Paul Giamatti) passing judgment on the actress's sex appeal and physical appearance. In another skit, she's the perfect undercover cop because she is so plain-looking that no one ever notices her. For much of the show, Schumer presents herself as a hard-drinking, sexually reckless woman, but her humor cuts both ways as she takes on body shaming, pay inequities, birth control, sexual assault, and other issues. Winner of an Emmy Award for Outstanding Variety Sketch Series, this set compiles the uncensored versions of all 10 episodes from the 2015 third season, with extras including a bonus unaired sketch, a collection of unaired interviews, and outtakes. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Maison Close: Season Two ★★★

Music Box, 400 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: 3 discs, \$34.95; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.95

This second season of the French-language series set in a Parisian brothel during the Belle Époque is set against the backdrop of the beginnings of the Third Republic, which stressed the restoration of moral order in the nation. Part of that agenda involved controlling prostitution in the city, which explains the prominence here of stern Chief Commissioner Torcy (Sébastien Libessart), whose rigor in trying to clamp down on the oldest profession leads Madame Hortense (Valérie Karsenti)—whose autocratic rule



over *The Paradise* was challenged in the earlier season—to play a dangerous balancing act between the police and ambitious gang leader Mosca (Michaël Cohen), who takes up residence in the house as the effective manager. Simmering animosities within his organization and hostility from other gangs alternate with the continuing stories of the women who try to survive in *The Paradise*, including Véra (Anne Charrier), whose hopes for her daughter are threatened by the girl's rebellious streak, and Rose (Jemima West), whose involvement with Mosca is endangered by his desire for a big score. The filmmakers' habit of using anachronistically modern music to nudge viewers toward a comparison between *The Paradise* women's attempt to achieve autonomy and today's continuing struggle for female equality can be jarring, but this is otherwise a sumptuously-mounted and well-acted series. Extras include a booklet with production notes, photos, and interviews. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Marco Polo: The Complete First Season

★★★

Anchor Bay, 547 min., not rated, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.99



Historical accuracy takes a backseat to excitement, political skullduggery, and sex in this Netflix original series about the titular 13th-century Venetian, who spent nearly 20 years at the court of the Mongolian warlord Kublai Khan and recorded his colorful experiences following his return to Europe. Lorenzo Richelmy is a handsome if also rather bland Marco, while Benedict Wong cuts an imposing bearlike figure as Khan. One of the many interwoven narrative strands focuses on Marco's assimilation into the royal court—despite suspicions from many of the ruler's family and advisors—including his training in martial arts and horsemanship by a grim Taoist monk called Hundred Eyes (Tom Wu). A second concerns the Italian's dangerous romantic interests at court, while a third involves Khan's determination to conquer the world—which leads not only to a struggle with his own brother over territory but also a protracted effort to capture a heavily-fortified Chinese city where the wily chancellor of the Song dynasty plots to have Khan assassinated. *Marco Polo* has a tendency to fall back repeatedly on the same clichés—Marco finds himself in chains and threatened with execution quite often—but the writing is generally solid, and the visuals are eye-catching. Presenting all 10 episodes from 2015, extras include a documentary on the historical Marco Polo, behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, a gag reel, and art and costume galleries. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Mr. Robot: Season 1

★★★★1/2

Universal, 484 min., not rated, DVD: 3 discs, \$44.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$49.98

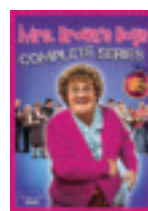


Rami Malek, who has delivered impressive performances in small film roles for years, takes the lead in this cable conspiracy series as Elliot, an intense, socially awkward computer hacker who works for a computer security outfit by day and metes out justice by night. That might make him sound like a superhero, but Elliot is emotionally troubled and unstable, self-medicating to maintain his equilibrium, while also spying on everyone to discover their secrets. Elliot is recruited by a cabal of revolutionary hackers led by an enigmatic anarchist known as "Mr. Robot" (Golden Globe-winner Christian Slater) to hack a powerful corporation known as Evil Corp and erase the debts of millions of citizens. *Mr. Robot* has an element of sci-fi but it's more of a conspiracy thriller seen through the perspective of a schizophrenic hero, whose dryly witty narration reveals a tormented mind: Elliot is paranoid and has hallucinations, so he must sort out what's real from what's in his head. The series, created by Sam Esmail, borrows from *Fight Club* and *V for Vendetta*, but takes its portrait of corporate power, cyber-crime, and grassroots-activists-as-anarchist-hackers into unexpected directions. Presenting all 10 episodes from the Golden Globe-winning 2015 debut season, extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Mrs. Brown's Boys: Complete Series

★★★★

Universal, 8 discs, 748 min., not rated, DVD: \$99.98



This BBC Scotland and RTÉ sitcom will mostly be unfamiliar to audiences not tuned into bawdy British TV. The show entirely revolves around Brendan O'Carroll who dons drag as the titular Mrs. Brown and spews out strings of foul-mouthed, wink-wink ad libs and malapropisms before an adoring live crowd. The setting is Agnes Brown's cluttered Dublin household and the cast is composed of her motley family, all of whom exist purely as foils for her dirty jokes, leering peepers, and naughty asides. O'Carroll rules the stage, frequently going off script to speak directly to the studio audience or his castmates. Goofs, bloopers, flubbed lines, and technical gaffes are all part of the fun in an otherwise ordinary set of highly Anglophilic family situations. Critics skewered the show as juvenile and offensive, which it most certainly is, although aside from the deliberately amateurish style and obsession with sex, it's not such a far cry from classic sitcoms like *Fawlty Towers*. O'Carroll's character is alter-

nately meddling, obnoxious, endearing, and imperious in the grand tradition of British drag comedians, but a little bit of Mrs. Brown goes a long way. Compiling all 18 episodes from the 2009-13 three-season run, extras includes seven Christmas specials. Not a necessary purchase. (T. Fry)

Mystery Science Theater 3000 Volume XXXIV

★★★★1/2

Shout! Factory, 4 discs, 480 min., not rated, DVD: \$59.99



This 34th compilation of the cult TV show *Mystery Science Theater 3000* follows the longstanding formula of screening really bad movies with snarky commentary delivered by a man and his robot companions imprisoned on a space station. All four movies roasted here hail from the B&W horror-fantasy '50s era of legendary cheapo studio American International Pictures. B-movie legendary director Roger Corman's self-explanatory *The Saga of the Viking Women and Their Voyage to the Waters of the Great Sea Serpent* (1957) is roundly mocked by Joel Hodgson (and robots), who also does the honors for filmmaker Bert I. Gordon's *War of the Colossal Beast* (1958), which follows the rampage of a deformed mutant giant through Mexico and California. Mike Nelson serves as wisecracking host for the other two AIP releases (both inspired by the '50s "Bridey Murphy" reincarnation craze): Edward L. Cahn's *The She Creature* (1956) and Corman's *The Undead* (1957). Nelson and the 'bots hilariously scold Leonard Maltin for giving the latter a positive write-up in his movie guides. Extras include new introductions by MST3K bit player Frank Conniff, and the full-length documentary *It Was a Colossal Teenage Movie Machine: The AIP Story*—a gossipy oral history of the company, featuring Corman, among others. Highly recommended. (C. Cassady)

Ray Donovan: Season Three

★★★★

Paramount, 637 min., not rated, DVD: 4 discs, \$42.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.99



This Showtime-aided series starring Liev Schreiber as a professional "fixer" in Los Angeles who covers up the scandals of the rich and famous presents an interesting collision of cultures. The son of a conniving small-time Boston crook (Jon Voight), Ray has lost his accent and suppressed his family's hot-headed nature beneath an unemotional front of cold reason and cool calculation. But the rest of the extended family still hangs on to their Boston-Irish identity, making Ray something of an outsider in his own home. As the third season begins, Ray has moved out of the house to live in a downtown apartment, and his brother Terry (Eddie Marsan)

is in prison, a victim of their father's latest ill-conceived criminal scheme. To spring Terry (who suffers from Parkinson's), Ray makes a deal with a shady Los Angeles mogul (Ian McShane) and lands in the middle of a struggle over the family business with the latter's ambitious daughter (Katie Holmes). Meanwhile, Ray's father puts the whole family in the crosshairs of the Armenian mob. The heart of the show is built on family conflict and Ray's guilt, anger, and self-imposed emotional isolation—and Schreiber carries the drama with a strong, understated portrayal. Compiling all 12 episodes from the 2015 third season, this dark drama is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Restless ★★★

Acorn, 185 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.99

A quiet tale of espionage and suspense, *Restless* spins a fine spy story that jumps between 1939 and 1976. Hayley Atwell stars as Eva Delectorskaya, a reluctant agent recruited by British Intelligence just in time for WWII. Michelle Dockery costars as the daughter who is astonished to not only learn of her mother's covert history 35 years later (Charlotte Rampling plays the older Eva), but also discover that the dangers of the past are still nipping at Eva's heels. This two-part 2012 miniseries unfolds through a judicious series of flashbacks and flashforwards that describe Eva's indoctrination to spycraft, her work spreading disinformation in the U.K. and the U.S., her romantic attachments, and the growing evidence that she's still part of the game—even in her dotage. Rather than fancy up the story with florid mystery or forced emotion, director Edward Hall wisely adopts a straightforward approach in adapting the 2006 novel by William Boyd. Eva's journey from innocent girl, to master spy, to paranoid operative still stuck out in the cold makes for a satisfying mix of tension and drama. And the ensemble cast is first rate, including Rufus Sewell and Michael Gambon. Extras include a photo gallery. Recommended. (T. Fry)



Shameless: The Complete Fifth Season

★★★1/2

Warner, 642 min., not rated, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$44.98

The relentless Sturm und Drang of the Gallagher clan returns in this fifth season set. The show's raison d'être has always been to convey the woozy and chaotic uncertainty at the center of one multi-layered, large Irish family. Fresh out of prison, Fiona (Emmy Rossum) is getting caught up with a new boss and further entangled in bad (though steamy) romantic decisions; Frank (William H. Macy) is recover-



ing from his liver transplant but still up to his neck in irresponsible, alcoholic behavior; and Ian (Cameron Monaghan) is diagnosed as bipolar and his actions become increasingly dangerous and bizarre. The Gallaghers' blue-collar South Side Chicago neighborhood is succumbing to gentrification—which doesn't sit well with anyone—and drugs are wreaking havoc in many quarters. None of this makes for a wholesome family dynamic, only by now it is really just the show's dedicated fans who will have much interest in following the outrageous and often insufferable antics of this brutal soap opera. Still, the series does score points for its portrait of a strong (albeit dysfunctional) family weathering storms together. Presenting all 12 episodes from the 2015 fifth season, extras include an audio commentary, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and unaired scenes. A strong optional purchase. (T. Fry)

Shaun the Sheep: Season One ★★★

Lionsgate, 2 discs, 280 min., not rated, DVD: \$14.98

The animated children's series *Shaun the Sheep* hails from Nick Park and Britain's Aardman Animations, creators of the *Wallace and Gromit* shorts and movies, and features the same style of stop-motion animation. Shaun is a diminutive but imaginative member of a flock of sheep who has a creative touch when it comes to having fun on his rural farm. The country barnyard is also home to an earnest sheep dog who balances his duties with an appreciation for Shaun's ideas; a trio of wily pigs, and a farmer who manages to remain oblivious to the antics of his livestock. The story is presented as silent movie comedy—with music and sound effects, but no dialogue (except bleating)—and each short episode is filled with clever visual humor and vivid personalities. This series ran on the Disney Channel in the U.S. in 2007 but this re-release is timed to coincide with the arrival of the Oscar-nominated *Shaun the Sheep* feature film. Compiling all 40 first season episodes, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, and a sing-along music video. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Show Me a Hero

★★★1/2

HBO, 2 discs, 358 min., TV-MA, DVD: \$39.98, Blu-ray: \$49.99

Developed by David Simon (creator of *The Wire*) from the titular 1999 non-fiction book by Lisa Belkin, this six-part 2015 HBO miniseries directed by Paul Haggis stars the talented Oscar Isaac as Nick Wasiczko, a city councilman who became the mayor of Yonkers in 1988 with



an anti-public housing campaign at a time when resentment to court-ordered low-income housing was so fierce it bordered on hysteria. A true story about public housing policy and city politics may not sound like the makings of compelling drama but *Show Me a Hero* showcases what Simon does best: exploring real-life events and issues through a dramatic lens that puts politics, economics, and social justice in personal terms. Wasiczko is at the center of the story but is only one character in an expansive canvas that encompasses not just the politicians but also the white homeowners resisting change (including Catherine Keener, whose bedrock civility is carried away by mob passions), and folks struggling to make a life for themselves in the crime-ridden projects—from a healthcare worker (LaTanya Richardson Jackson) going blind from diabetes, to a single mother (Ilfenesh Hadera) from the Dominican Republic forced to leave her children back on the island while she supports them from Yonkers. The narrative spans several years as the protests and court cases drag on and is as much about the polarization of politics as it is about the resentment and fear surrounding desegregation. Extras include a "making-of" featurette. A powerful, provocative drama, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

South Park: The Complete Eighteenth Season ★★★1/2

Paramount, 2 discs, 220 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Creator and voice stars Trey Parker and Matt Stone haven't quite beat the dead horse to a bloody pulp, as evidenced with this 2014 10-episode 18th season of the long-running vulgar animated series, which includes continuations of storylines (in a change from the usual standalone episodes or specific arcs). In "Go Fund Yourself," potty-mouthed Colorado grade-schoolers Kyle, Stan, Cartman, and Kenny drop out of classes to make money on a start-up company that does nothing; "Gluten Free Ebola" finds the boys on the outs with their school friends and trying to get back in their good graces by offering up singer Lorde (who is actually Stan's dad); "The Cissy" features Cartman jumping on the transgender train to get better bathroom privileges; and "Handicar" spotlights handicapped Timmy as he takes over the local rideshare market. Also featuring the Emmy-nominated episode "Freemium Isn't Free" (with an appearance by *South Park* movie characters Terrance and Phillip), "Cock Magic," and the two-part season finale "#REHASH" and "#HappyHolograms," extras include episode commentaries and deleted scenes. A strong optional purchase. (J. Williams-Wood)



True Detective: The Complete Second Season ★★1/2

HBO, 3 discs, 503 min., TV-MA, DVD: \$59.99, Blu-ray: \$79.98



The second season of the crime anthology series created and written for HBO by novelist Nic Pizzolatto takes on an entirely new mystery, complete with a fresh setting and cast of characters. This one comes out of the tradition of L.A. crime fiction with political corruption and compromised cops, an elaborate web of criminal cover-ups, gangsters, and graft. Colin Farrell plays Ray Velcoro, a detective with anger issues in the mob's pocket; Rachel McAdams is Ani Bezzerides, a rising detective whose reckless personal life threatens her career; and Vince Vaughn is Frank Semyon, a smooth career criminal trying to go legit in a major new redevelopment scheme. The tangled storyline kicks off with the murder of a city manager and the disappearance of Frank's seed money, which lands him in trouble with his mobbed-up partners. Ray and Ani are then teamed with a motorcycle officer (Taylor Kitsch) for a murder investigation that isn't supposed to go anywhere but draws them into a conspiracy involving the rich and powerful in a (fictional) economically depressed California town. After the acclaim for the Southern gothic vibe of the brilliant first season, audiences were disappointed in this more familiar urban crime drama and critics lambasted the show for its shopworn character types and plot twists. But it's well-written, overall, with a vivid atmosphere of seediness and desperation. Compiling all eight episodes from 2015, extras include episode commentaries and behind-the-scenes featurettes. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmayer)

Under the Dome: Season 3 ★★★

Paramount, 4 discs, 546 min., not rated, DVD: \$64.99, Blu-ray: \$76.99



It wasn't exactly trumpets that brought the fall, but just like the fabled walls of Jericho, the *Dome* came tumbling down. Good thing, as CBS finally pulled the plug after three increasingly bizarre seasons of what began as a summer replacement series in 2013. Even during its first giddy season, *Under the Dome* didn't take long to start running off the rails with goofiness that was out of sync with Stephen King's 2009 source novel. Up to and including the apocalyptic finale, the writers here seem to be scrambling around for plot deviations and mostly coming up empty with a cockamamie alien pod-people sideline complete with killer queens, a society of followers known as the Kinship, and a band of resistance fighters lost in the network of tunnels beneath the town of Chester's Mill.

Even the actors seem to struggle with putting much effort into the silly shenanigans: Dean Norris as Big Jim, Mike Vogel as Barbie, and Rachelle Lefevre as Julia appear confused themselves as the sci-fi narrative turns even more cartoon-like with re-birthed humans and Dome-inspired delusions. Compiling all 13 episodes from 2015, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, extended and deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Optional, at best. (T. Fry)

UnREAL: Season 1

★★★1/2

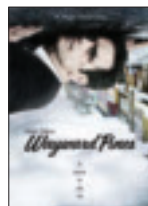
Lionsgate, 2 discs, 440 min., not rated, DVD: \$26.98



An acidic satire of reality TV, this Lifetime series is set behind the scenes of a *Bachelor*-like show (here called *Everlasting*). Constance Zimmer stars as Quinn King, the manipulative producer who engineers conflict in order to create the kind of showy drama that earns ratings, while Shiri Appleby is production assistant Rachel Goldberg, Quinn's star protégé. Nobody is better at mind games and psychological manipulation than Rachel...which makes her miserable. And that pretty much sets the stage for everything that happens behind the curtain of this contrived dating show, in which a dozen or so contestants compete for a handsome young British bachelor (Freddie Stroma) who is heir to a hotel fortune. But while there is a catty competitiveness between the women, the real drama occurs behind the camera where Quinn and her team conspire to bring out the worst behavior in the contestants. Created by Marti Noxon and Sarah Gertrude Shapiro (a war-scarred veteran of the real *The Bachelor*), *UnREAL* is less an outright parody and more of a scathing commentary on the culture that feeds the genre. Presenting all 10 episodes from the 2015 debut season, extras include bonus footage. Highly recommended. (S. Axmayer)

Wayward Pines ★★★

Fox, 3 discs, 440 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.98



Filmmaker M. Night Shyamalan (*The Sixth Sense*) may have lost the Midas touch, but his reputation is on the upswing again, in part due to *Wayward Pines*. The former wunderkind is an executive producer and he directed the premiere episode of this agreeably spooky mystery drama—based on a 2012-14 trilogy of novels by Blake Crouch—about the black hole goings-on in a small town in Idaho. Matt Dillon carries an ironic twinkle in his eye as secret service agent Ethan Burke, whose missing person investigation takes him to Wayward Pines, a destination that he is apparently bound never to leave. It's the kind of place where the route out of town loops end-

lessly back in, the phone lines are constantly down, and the kooky inhabitants all share a wavelength of paranoia. Chief among them is Sheriff Pope (Terrence Howard), who rules with an iron fist and public executions. The debut season sports some maddening, circular plots and an absolutely insane backstory, but the detailed production design, creative chutzpah, and surefooted ensemble cast make for many memorable moments. The residents include Toby Jones as a malevolent psychiatrist, Melissa Leo as a not-so-kindly Nurse Ratched-type, Carla Gugino as one of Burke's (maybe) missing people, and Juliette Lewis as a seemingly sympathetic bartender. Compiling all 10 episodes from the 2015 first season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Recommended. (T. Fry)

Zoo: Season One ★★★

Paramount, 4 discs, 540 min., not rated, DVD: \$64.99, Blu-ray: \$76.99



This offbeat thriller adapted from the titular 2012 bestselling novel by James Patterson and Michael Ledwidge serves up a tale of animals taking over Earth. A pandemic grows from strange lion attacks in Los Angeles and bizarre, systematic prowling of creatures on the African Plain. And it doesn't stop until the world's fauna are united in war against humans. A team of five far-flung cast members spout pseudoscientific jargon and engage in twisted logic to figure things out, without much success. But no matter: this is cartoony good fun with a serious edge to the drama and action. Along the way, there are coordinated bat attacks, bears that communicate and work to corral people, and lots of talk about a sacred "mother cell" that might be a cure (distributed globally via mosquitoes, no less). The setting shuttles between Botswana, Fukushima, Rio, Paris, and Mobile, AL, and the animal special effects are particularly well done, right down to the eerie, widened pupils of infected hordes of realistic-looking CGI beasts. James Wolk is the nominal star as Dr. Oz, a researcher in Africa whose right hand is Abraham Kenyatta (Nonso Anozie). Less believable is a miscast Kristen Connolly as a brash journalist, while Nora Arnezeder as a French agent and Billy Burke as a soulful veterinarian round out the gang. Presenting all 13 episodes from the 2015 debut season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Recommended. (T. Fry)

VideoLibrarianOnline

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) for more reviews during March and April, including: *Black Work*, *The Bold Ones: The Lawyers—The Complete Series*, *Chasing Shadows*, *Thérèse Raquin*, *The Widower*, and much more!

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

★★★★★ = Excellent

★★★★ = Good

★★★ = Fair

★★ = Poor

PPR = Public Performance Rights

DRA = Digital Rights Available

Aud = Audience

K = Preschool-Kindergarten

E = Elementary (grades 1-3)

I = Intermediate (grades 4-6)

J = Jr. High (grades 7-8)

H = High School (grades 9-12)

C = Colleges & Universities

P = Public Libraries

CHILDREN'S

Alice in Wonderland: Down the Rabbit Hole ★★

(2015) 9 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-68262-974-1.

Paying tribute to Lewis Carroll's 1865 classic *Alice in Wonderland*, this iconographic-animated adaptation of the 2015 picture book written by Joe Rhatigan and Charles Nurnberg and featuring acrylic painting illustrations by Eric Puybaret is narrated by *Downton Abbey*'s Joanne Froggatt. This modern retelling follows the well-worn story of little girl Alice's ordinary day by the river, which turns zany after she follows a rabbit with a pocket watch down a hole. Alice uses deductive reasoning (eating and drinking random labeled items that shrink and grow her body) to make her way through a garden, runs a race with various creatures, and gets advice from a blue caterpillar. Unfortunately, the story oddly stops on a cliffhanger—for those familiar with the original novel—right before the infamous tea party. A strangely abridged version of a beloved tale, this is an optional purchase, at best. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Angry Birds—Stella: The Complete First Season ★★

(2015) 78 min. DVD: \$14.99. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

This 13-episode 2015 first season of the 3D motion-animated series spin-off

from the popular *Angry Birds* video game franchise serves up a strange compilation of related shorts featuring the titular pink heroine. Without using words—except for a brief muffled "sweet" or "hey"—Stella and her brightly colored friends communicate through expressions and convey their emotions through noises. "A Fork in the Friendship" finds purple bird Gale drunk with power after she discovers a crown and a magic book—and is immediately worshipped by a gaggle of weird green pig-like creatures. "Bad Princess" alerts Stella and the gang to Gale's new stature, while other episodes center on hang-gliding practice ("Own the Sky"), power plays ("The Golden Egg"), an awkward celebration ("Don't Steal My Birthday"), and a Stella/Gale showdown ("To the Bitter End"). Extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Offering very little in the way of life lessons, this is not a necessary purchase. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Be Cool, Scooby-Doo! Season 1, Part 1 ★★

(2015) 2 discs. 292 min. DVD: \$19.98. Warner Home Video (avail. from most distributors).

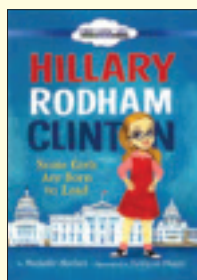
Marking the 12th show to feature cartoon scaredy cat Great Dane Scooby-Doo, this Cartoon Network-aired series is set during the summer after the gang finishes high school. Compiling 12 episodes from the 2015 first season, opener "Mystery 101" focuses on brainy Mystery Inc. member Velma's (newly voiced by Kate Micucci) quest to enroll at the prestigious Kingston University. Scoob (Frank Welker), Shaggy (Matthew Lillard), Fred (also Welker), and Daphne (Grey Griffin)—who's

on a zany puppet kick—are all on hand to help crack the case when the ghost of the college founder keeps scaring away potential students. "Be Quiet, Scooby-Doo!" takes place during a colorful underground Crystal Canopy cave tour, as a strange "Crystal Crawler" monster makes mayhem with scientific researchers; and "Party Like It's 1899" centers on a costumed mystery party at Wuthering Manor, where a headless apparition comes to life during a sleuthing game. Also including "Screama Donna," "Kitchen Nightmare" (Scooby and Shaggy's food mentor's Cheese Volcano eatery is threatened by a Yeti snow monster), "Me, Myself, and A.I.," and more, this snappy update—with silly asides that will appeal to adults as well as young people—is recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

A Dance Like Starlight ★★

(2015) 8 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-63379-448-1.

Subtitled "One Ballerina's Dream," this iconographic-animated adaptation of author Kristy Dempsey and illustrator Floyd Cooper's 2014 picture book is narrated by Bahni Turpin and presented in realistic oil wash. *A Dance Like Starlight* focuses on a little black girl with dancing dreams in 1950s Harlem. "Hope can pick your dream up," Mama says, "off the floor of your heart." And Mama would know, thanks to her hard work handling and cleaning the costumes for a nearby ballet school. Tagging along with her mother, the girl impresses the ballet master with her copycat of routines—performed in the wings—and she joins the lessons (although not in front with the white girls)—and is good



Hillary Rodham Clinton: Some Girls Are Born to Lead ★★½

(2016) 13 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-52000-366-5.

Monicagate? Wall Street ties? Private email controversy? Young viewers will find none of those mentioned in this biographical profile of current presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton—an iconographic-animated adaptation of the 2016 picture book written by Michelle Markel and illustrated by LeUyen Pham. But let's not throw the former First Lady out with the Whitewater (rim shot). Narrated by Lesa Lockford, this inspirational girl-power portrait notes that Hillary Rodham grew up in the 1950s in a "man's world." As a teenager, Hillary attended a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.; she later graduated from Wellesley College, earned a degree from Yale Law School, and married future Arkansas governor and U.S. President Bill Clinton. As a First Lady and mother to young Chelsea, Hillary was part of a "new breed, a Superwoman." Because Hillary took a much more active role in politics than was characteristic of a First Lady, she met resistance, particularly over her role in promoting universal healthcare (she had to wear a bulletproof vest on speaking tours). Clinton went on to make history as a senator from New York ("no First Lady had ever done such a thing"), before mounting a failed bid for the presidency in 2008, and then taking a position as Secretary of State in the Obama administration. Adults may have differing opinions about Hillary Clinton, but no one can deny her very real achievements as a woman who has broken more than one glass ceiling. Extras include a detailed, narrated timeline of Clinton's life and career to date. An inspiring true-life female empowerment biography for kids, this is highly recommended. Aud: E, P. (R. Pitman)



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enough to be picked out for a demonstration. Seeing a picture of “colored” prima ballerina Janet Collins in the newspaper inspires the mother and daughter to go see the dancer at the Metropolitan Opera for a night full of awe and joy. An engaging ode to hope and aspiration, this is recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla ★★

(2015) 8 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-0-545-87915-6.

This animated adaptation of a 2014 picture book by author Katherine Applegate and illustrator G. Brian Karas tells the story of Ivan, beginning with his capture as a cute baby western lowland gorilla in the Congo by poachers with “loud guns and cruel hands.” Sold to owners of the B&I shopping mall in Tacoma, WA, along with a female in 1964, Ivan got his name after shoppers were encouraged to enter a “name the babies” contest (sadly, the girl gorilla, Burma, died after a few months). Dressed in human clothes and given a bed, Ivan’s activities included baseball games and riding a motorcycle, until he grew too big and was put into a cage in the mall, where he engaged in channel-surfing, finger-painting, and people-watching in a lonely existence. After nearly 30 years at B&I, the organization PAWS and others banded together to get Ivan out of the shopping center and into a zoo, where he was able to gradually adjust to life with other gorillas. A strange true story—brought to national attention by Applegate, who won a Newbery Medal for her *The One and Only Ivan*—this is recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Looking at Lincoln ★★

(2015) 10 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-63379-611-9.

Narrated by Elizabeth Cottle, this iconographic-animated adaptation of author and illustrator Maira Kalman’s 2012 picture book about America’s 16th President follows a little girl who sees a tall man on her way to a coffee shop breakfast and is reminded of Abraham Lincoln. Heading to the library (yes!) to find out more information, the girl marvels at the plethora of books written about the man with the “unusual face.” Our protagonist gleans a lot of information about Abe, from his log cabin birth in his native Kentucky to his good relationship with his stern-looking stepmother, longtime love of learning, job as a lawyer (“He did like to argue”), and marriage to Mary Todd. Touching on lesser-known aspects of Lincoln’s life (including the fact that he used his top hat to carry notes, loved Pippin apples, and especially enjoyed Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*), as well as his defining role in the Civil War, this historical short is recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

ALA-ALSC Notable Videos 2016

ALA’s Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC) has selected its 2016 list of Notable Children’s Videos, which includes DVDs for children 14 years of age and younger. Unless otherwise noted, titles are available from most distributors or the companies are listed in the “Distributor Addresses” on page 82.

Bugs in My Hair! (Weston Woods, 8 min., DVD: \$59.95). Narrated by Jesse Bernstein, this excellent animated adaptation of writer-illustrator David Shannon’s lighthearted 2013 picture book tackles an embarrassing subject as it follows a boy who has cartoonish head lice. (VL-11/15)

I’m Brave (Weston Woods, 8 min., DVD: \$59.95). An animated adaptation of author and illustrator couple Kate and Jim McMullan’s 2014 picture book—from their popular series—this tale centers on a firehouse and a busy anthropomorphic fire truck (drawlingly narrated by Jonathan Banks). (VL-11/15)

Peanut Butter and Jellyfish (Weston Woods, 8 min., DVD: \$59.95). Author-illustrator-narrator Jarrett J. Krosoczka uses acrylic colors to depict underwater neon sea creatures and plants in this fun animated tale based on his 2014 picture book, which follows frolicking best buddies Peanut Butter the seahorse and Jellyfish (the jellyfish). (VL-1/16)

Same Same But Different (Weston Woods, 8 min., DVD: \$59.95). Author and illustrator Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw’s 2011 picture book is adapted in this vibrantly colorful iconographic-animated short that features dual-narration by Maxwell Glick and Vikas Adam, comparing and contrasting the lives of two young boys whose teachers have matched them up in a pen pal program. (VL-9/15)

Scaredy Squirrel at Night (Weston Woods, 11 min., DVD: \$59.95). The latest in author-illustrator Mélanie Watt’s series

following the escapades of an endearingly neurotic squirrel, this animated adaptation of her 2009 picture book—narrated by David de Vries—finds the titular hero trying to stay awake to avoid bad dreams. (See review on page 58)

That is NOT a Good Idea! (Weston Woods, 7 min., DVD: \$59.95). Winner of the Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Children’s Video, this adaptation of author-illustrator-narrator Mo Willems’s 2013 picture book is framed as an old-timey filmstrip watched by adorable giggly baby geese who follow the story of Hungry Fox in his pursuit of Plump Goose. (See review on page 58)

The Toxic Life Cycle of a Cigarette (Human Relations Media, 17 min., DVD: \$149.95, web: hrmvideo.com). Featuring comments from teen farm workers and a leading scientist, this eye-opening live-action guidance program outlines the downsides of cigarette manufacturing and disposal, as well as the widely-known health hazards of smoking.

Viva Frida (Dreamscape, 11 min., DVD: \$38.99). Based on the Caldecott Honor Book and Pura Belpré Award winner (for Latino works for children), this iconographic-animated adaptation of author-illustrator Yuyi Morales’s 2014 picture book—narrated by Adriana Sananes—offers an introduction to famed Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. (VL-9/15)

Members of the 2016 Carnegie Medal/Notable Children’s Videos Committee are: Chair, Lizabeth L. Deskins, Hilliard City Schools, OH; Eric Carpenter, Fred A. Toomey Elementary School, Atlanta, GA; Linda L. Ernst, King County Library System, Mercer Island, WA; Joanna Fabicon, Los Angeles Public Library; Dr. Sharon McQueen, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA; Maryann H. Owen, Oak Creek Public Library, WI; Susan H. Polos, Bedford Central School District, Mt. Kisco, NY; and Laurie B. Reese, Los Angeles Public Library.



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Piggy Tales: The Complete First Season ★

(2015) 51 min. DVD: \$14.99. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

A companion to the *Angry Birds* video game spin-off *Bad Piggies*, this computer-animated 31-episode first season from 2015 consists of brief minute-plus segments that feature wordless small creatures who look like green peas, only with pig snouts and ears. The opening episode, "Trampoline," follows a Piggy who ignores a sign cautioning against jumping on a trampoline and ends up smashed on the ceiling...along with the remnants of other Pigs who didn't pay attention. "Abduction" finds a big Pig laughing at a small UFO...until it forces its way into the pig's mouth and lifts him away; "Superglue" joins together several Piggies by accident; and "Epic Sir Bucket" features a nonsensical joust. Extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. An unimaginative series trying to ride the financial coattails of a popular video game, this is not recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

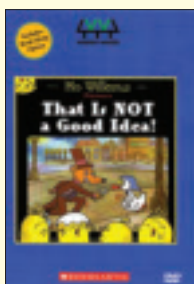
Scaredy Squirrel at Night ★★★

(2015) 11 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-0-545-87923-1.

Narrated by David de Vries, this latest animated adaptation of author-illustrator Mé-

lanie Watt's series following the escapades of an endearingly neurotic squirrel is based on her 2009 picture book. Noting that he never sleeps—in order to avoid the risk of having a bad dream (his thoughts of freaky dragons, fairies, ghosts, unicorns, etc., are presented in a jumbled kaleidoscope style)—Scaredy Squirrel has plenty of ideas to keep busy, including counting stars and scrapbooking. However, even he admits that sleep loss has side effects—including energy

loss, hallucinations, and confusion. When his horoscope ominously predicts that his dreams will come true, Scaredy springs into a silly plan of preventative action (featuring a teddy bear decoy, molasses, and a fire extinguisher). Naturally, there will be an unexpected hitch in his strategy. An ALSC Notable Children's Video selection, this engaging tale about a cute rodent with an overactive imagination is recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)



That is NOT a Good Idea! ★★★1/2

(2015) 7 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-0-545-87932-3.

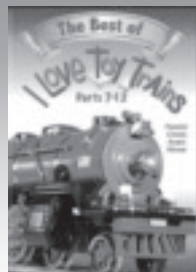
Narrated by prolific author and illustrator Mo Willems, this animated adaptation of his 2013 picture book is framed as an old-time filmstrip being watched by adorable giggly baby geese. The story follows Hungry Fox, who meets Plump Goose and asks if the lady would like to go for a stroll. When she responds positively, the audience of little geese voice their doubts, yelling "that is NOT a good idea!" This peanut gallery gang continues to respond unfavorably, arguing that it is really, really, really not a good plan for Plump Goose to follow Hungry Fox into the deep dark woods...into his kitchen...to help him boil soup water. But there's a surprise in store—for the viewer! Also including a read-along option and a "Team Mo" featurette by the writer's daughter, Trixie Willems, this fun short—winner of the 2016 Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Children's Video and an ALSC Notable Children's Video selection—is highly recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)



Children's Classics



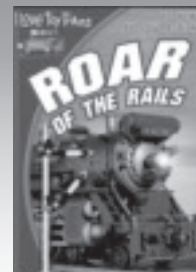
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At the Beach ★★★

(2014) 6 min. In French w/English subtitles. DVD: \$79. DRA. National Film Board of Canada. PPR.

Directed by Jeremy Peter Allen, this addition to the National Film Board of Canada's *5 Shorts Project* series takes a brief glimpse at a July 2014 beach event held by Association des Grands Brûlés F.L.A.M., a Quebec resource for burn victims and their families. At first, the chatter of families and shots of sunbathers and beachgoers make this seem like any other popular recreation spot, but a closer look reveals that a number of people have various burns. A few talk about being out in the sun for the first time in years and feeling comfortable at an outing where scars need not be hidden. "You can't change what you are," says one participant. "If it bothers people, they can just look away." An interesting short depicting a lazy summer day gathering that was likely both challenging and freeing for participants, this slice-of-life portrait is recommended. Aud: C, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Changed Forever: Grieving the Death of Someone You Love ★★★½

(2015) 50 min. DVD: \$59.95. Paraclete Press (avail. from most distributors). PPR. ISBN: 978-1-61261-754-1.

"Grief is like a tunnel that closes in behind you—the only way out is through," viewers are told in this guidance video from faith-based Paraclete Press that is short on proselytizing and long on empathy for those experiencing grief. Granted, the role of faith is explored here (along with the universal question, "How could God allow this to happen?") in an authentic and sensitive manner, but much of the material is equally applicable to believers and non-believers. *Changed Forever* features interviews with people in the midst of grieving, as well as three experts in grief counseling, while offering support to those struggling with the loss of a loved one. Likely to be of some comfort is the affirmation that everyone experiences grief in a highly personal way; there is no predetermined timeframe, style, or parameters for a "proper" grieving process. This will somewhat soothe those who are troubled by the often well-intentioned question, "Isn't it time to move on now?" The simple answer is no, not until a person is ready. Although there is no upside to grief, many report that—over time—the terrible pain becomes a "sweet sadness" that comes and goes. Also featuring a discussion guide, this is highly recommended, especially for those without similar fare such as Paraclete Press's *Grieving the Sudden Death of a Loved One* (VL-3/13). Aud: P. (C. Block)

My Depression ★★★

(2015) 30 min. DVD: \$79; public libraries; \$175: colleges & universities. DRA. The Video Project. PPR. Closed captioned.

Sigourney Weaver, Steve Buscemi, and Fred Armisen are among the voice talent cast for this animated HBO-aired documentary from filmmakers Roz Lichter and Josh Hetzler centered on the complex issues and symptoms surrounding clinical depression. The central character is a woman who appears carefree at times, but more often is staving off the emergence of a black cloud or is losing her sense of self-worth in a world full of people she believes are more interesting than her. She tries to stay isolated, but a friend lures her up from the depths only to find that our poor heroine isn't ready for it: she can't find anything to talk about, can't make eye contact—all she wants to do is escape. Outlining some of the symptoms of protracted depression, including mercurial temperament, unpredictability, and suicidal thoughts and feelings, *My Depression* reminds viewers that there is no quick fix, but often lots of hard work involving commitment to therapy, while on the road to gradually rebuilding self-esteem. Based on Broadway producer Elizabeth Swados's award-winning 2005 memoir *My Depression: A Picture Book*, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Of Men and War ★★★½

(2015) 103 min. DVD: \$149 (\$349 w/PPR). DRA. Kino Lorber Edu.

The human cost of America's recent wars

is powerfully portrayed in filmmaker Laurent Bécue-Renard's documentary, which focuses on patients at The Pathway Home, a residential therapy facility in the Napa Valley where Vietnam vet Fred Gusman and his staff conduct individual and group sessions with soldiers and medics suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of their service in Afghanistan and Iraq. Shot in fly-on-the-wall style over the course of five years, *Of Men and War* gradually focuses on a number of patients who are encouraged to break the self-erected walls of emotional resistance to their feelings—releasing a mixture of grief, rage, and anxiety that could take the form of angry outbursts, helpless weeping, or stunned silence. Bécue-Renard also follows the men on outings or, in some cases, on their return home, where they struggle to rebuild their lives with wives and children. *Of Men and War* is often painful to watch; PTSD is not an easily treated condition, and therapeutic success may be only partial and also extremely fragile. However, the film is not primarily concerned with the specific psychological methods employed by Pathway; rather, it offers an incisive and often disturbing portrait of individuals who are so scarred by their combat experience that they are unable to function in the civilian world—men who are now engaged in a fight that may be as difficult as any they faced on the battlefield. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY



Quakers: That of God in Everyone ★★★½

(2015) 90 min. DVD: \$19.99. Vision Video.

Filmmaker Isaac Stambaugh's excellent documentary skillfully traces the impact of Quakers on American history, from the Colonial era up into the 21st century. Arriving in the future nation during the late 17th century, William Penn and fellow Quaker settlers took possession of land granted them by England's throne, but also wrote compensatory treaties with the indigenous peoples who were already here. Spreading up and down the East Coast, the Quakers would eventually find their principles in direct conflict with the country's growing reliance on a slave-based economy.

Many Quakers migrated from the south to Ohio and other Northwest Territories, often taking slaves along and freeing them upon arrival (Quakers were also instrumental in helping slaves escape through the Underground Railroad). Stories of Quaker philanthropists and activists are abundant here, including those of Sarah and Isaac Harvey, who gained a private audience with Abraham Lincoln and had a hand in his thinking concerning the language of the Emancipation Proclamation. The role of pacifist Quakers in the Civil War, World War I, World War II, and the first Gulf War is explored, offering an impressive account of men and women acting on their consciences yet not shirking responsibilities (driving ambulances and providing relief in the thick of battle action). Quaker involvement in the Civil Rights movement is also covered here, as is the role of Quaker schools in contemporary U.S. society. Serving up a fine historical study of a religious group's trials and triumphs while living in an often fractious, violent land, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)

SOCIAL & POLITICAL ISSUES

14: Dred Scott, Wong Kim Ark & Vanessa Lopez ★★1/2

(2014) 67 min. DVD: \$375. DRA. Graham Street Productions. PPR.

One of the surprise issues to arise in the 2016 presidential campaign involves citizenship. Anne Galisky's documentary offers three stories about determining the definition of citizenship—two historic cases that resulted in landmark rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court and one contemporary instance regarding the child of illegal immigrants. The film begins with the infamous Dred Scott case, which resulted in the 1857 Supreme Court ruling that blacks could not be U.S. citizens and had no standing that would allow them to bring litigation. Often overlooked insights regarding the Dred Scott case are presented here, most notably regarding the inclusion of Scott's wife Harriet in the litigation, and the acknowledgment that many enslaved blacks tried to use the courts to push for their liberty. The documentary then moves to the Wong Kim Ark case, in which a San Francisco-born Chinese-American successfully forced the Supreme Court in 1898 to define birthright citizenship as per the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. This case recently gained new attention via the debate on so-called "anchor babies" (children born in the U.S. to illegal immigrants), which leads to the film's third story regarding U.S.-born Vanessa Lopez and her Mexican parents. Unfortunately, the Lopez story intentionally blurs the lines between legal and illegal immigration, moving the film away from history lesson and towards political statement. Still, this is sure to spark discussion and should be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Being Canadian ★★★

(2015) 89 min. DVD: \$59.95 (\$250 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Robert Cohen takes a seriocomic look at Canadian identity in this self-described home movie (possibly so-called because many of his friends, such as comedian Dana Gould, appear here). Working in Hollywood as a sitcom writer and traveling extensively outside of Canada, Cohen has encountered every variety of stereotype about his fellow Canadians. Here, he travels across Canada, starting in Nova Scotia and ending in Vancouver for Canada Day, while also incorporating comments from non-Canadians, who tend to characterize the country as clean, cold, and white. Cohen thinks the widespread ignorance stems from indifference, since Canada rarely appears in the news. Because Cohen is a comedy writer, it's not surprising to hear from *SNL*

and SCTV performers. As Martin Short notes, Canadians and Americans look much the same. "It's almost as if they're Russian spies dressed up as Americans." Cohen also looks at Canadians' "supposedly boring history," tolerance for low temperatures, and reputation for niceness. If Canadians are known for apologizing for anything at the drop of the hat, some speakers believe that the overly polite façade hides some intense passive-aggressiveness. As Michael J. Fox points out, the national sport—hockey—is hardly genteel. Other speakers include Seth Rogen, Alan Thicke, and members of the power rock trio Rush. Some of these are standard interviews, others not: Cohen speaks with Jason Priestley, for instance, in front of a fireplace with beers and a small dog at their side, while he chats with Dave Foley in bed. Anyone who has ever felt simultaneously proud of and embarrassed by his or her hometown is likely to relate to Cohen's findings. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Chau, Beyond the Lines ★★★

(2014) 34 min. DVD: \$79; public libraries & high schools; \$299 w/PPR: colleges & universities. Seventh Art Releasing.

Filmmaker Courtney Marsh's extraordinary documentary—Oscar-nominated for Best Documentary Short—begins in a grim setting: a facility in Ho Chi Minh City for kids who are living with severe birth defects and disabilities directly tied to Agent Orange, a notorious chemical defoliant that the U.S. sprayed on Vietnamese forests for a decade. Up to 4.8 million people in Vietnam have been affected by their parents' exposure to the poison via rivers and other natural sources. Among the boys at the "Agent Orange School" is Chau, a teen with misshapen arms and legs whose dream to become an artist runs afoul of the institution's staff. Chau

is threatened with dismissal if he doesn't focus on acquiring job skills, but before he can be expelled, Chau decides to move back home, where he faces a lonely existence and a complicated physical environment. However, just when things are looking pretty bleak (enough so that Chau admits to contemplating suicide), his determination and raw talent as a painter earn him a deserved break—and possible future. An inspiring portrait, this is highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Cody High: A Life Remodeled Project ★★★

(2014) 78 min. DVD: \$14.99. Vision Video.

The Cody Rouge community of Detroit was not a place someone would want to stop in, says a longtime resident at the beginning of this spirited, inspiring documentary. Particular streets in the neighborhood were unofficially off-limits by mid-afternoon, due to brazen gang activity in an area where dozens of houses were abandoned and falling apart—a reflection of Detroit's larger problems with crumbling industries, abandonment of homes, and collapsed city services. Filmmaker Walter V. Marshall's documentary captures the incredible blight that struck Cody Rouge, especially in its schools and along residential streets, where kids were growing up with no sense of purpose, joining gangs for survival and a sense of family. Along came the nonprofit organization Life Remodeled, which took a holistic approach to rebuilding the community both literally and spiritually. *Cody High* tells the story of a massive effort to fix the schools and a number of houses, clean up and beautify the streets, and even refurbish a football field (including acquiring used goalposts from the Detroit Lions). But this was not just about structural



The High Cost of Cheap Gas ★★★1/2

(2014) 56 min. DVD: \$39; public libraries; \$79; high schools; \$159; colleges & universities. DRA. Green Planet Films. PPR.

Filmmakers Jeffrey Barbee and Mira Dutschke's alarming documentary draws parallels between the environmental impact of hydraulic fracturing—or fracking—in American communities and in regions of Africa. In both cases, fracking invariably yields the same disastrous results: polluted and/or lowered water tables, poisoned water sources for humans and animals, toxic underground gases released into the air we breathe, and other forms of environmental devastation that fossil fuel companies perpetuate, exiting before they can be held responsible for any long-term consequences. In the U.S., fracking was exempted (through legislation signed by George W. Bush in 2005) from such federal laws as the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act. In such places as South Africa or Botswana, however, the situation is even worse, as weak governments are trampled by energy corporations that acquire and pollute scarce drinking water resources before disappearing with their profits and leaving a mess for locals to clean up. Similar problems surround the exploitation of methane and other non-renewable energy sources. *The High Cost of Cheap Gas* argues that there is no clean way of extracting these resources from the Earth, and that corporate greed and cynicism will sadly prevail when it comes to issues of responsibility. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)

improvements; *Life Remodeled* also helped create or restore programs for kids, with local mentorship providing direction. It's exciting to see Cody Rouge discover a newfound pride in this upbeat film about helping to lift people out of chronic hopelessness. Recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

How to Change the World ★★★½

(2015) 109 min. DVD: \$149 (\$349 w/PPR). DRA. Kino Lorber Edu.

Greenpeace may be the world's best-known environmental organization, but as filmmaker Jerry Rothwell's documentary demonstrates, its beginnings were humble and sometimes contentious. Employing a wide spectrum of archival material—including clips from news broadcasts and 16mm footage drawn from the group's own vaults—Rothwell charts the movement's transformation from 1971, when it started as a ragtag collection of Vancouver, B.C., activists gathering to protest a U.S. underground nuclear test on an Alaskan island, up through 1979, when Greenpeace—a name adopted almost accidentally—was reorganized with an elaborate international structure. Present-day interviews with surviving members of the original team center on the late Bob Hunter, a charismatic, guru-like reporter who spearheaded the nuclear protest and then went on to lead the group's publicity-rich encounter with Russian whalers off the California coast (an amusing aside involves consultation of the *I Ching* about where to concentrate their search). Although successful (mostly due to capturing graphic and appalling footage of the Soviet-era ships slaughtering immature whales), fissures eventually erupted within the leadership over goals and tactics: a major split arose between Hunter and his unofficial second-in-command, Paul Watson, during a save-the-seals campaign (which Brigitte Bardot promoted). Interview clips—with Hunter's daughter and many erstwhile colleagues, including Patrick Moore, whose environmental corporate-consulting firm is considered a sellout by old friends—underscore the fact that the rancor over whether Greenpeace made sensible compromises or actually betrayed its mission continues even today. Serving up a timely profile of a significant environmental institution, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Old South ★★★½

(2015) 54 min. DVD: \$89: public libraries, \$350: colleges & universities. *Women Make Movies*. PPR.

Filmed in a historically African-American neighborhood in Athens, GA, filmmaker Danielle Beverly's *Old South* centers on a predominantly white college fraternity that moves onto a street where black families have lived for generations. The first sign that things will not go well comes when the frat house hosts an antebellum celebration that includes a parade, costumes, and Confederate



The Storm Makers ★★★

(2015) 66 min. In Khmer w/English subtitles. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmaker Guillaume Suon's bleak PBS-aided POV documentary offers a shocking look at human trafficking in Southeast Asia. Cambodian youth, we learn, are easily sold into slavery in Thailand, Malaysia, and Taiwan, beginning with false promises that are made by traffickers to the victims' starving, uneducated families. By focusing on the terrible experiences of dead-eyed teenager and former slave Aya, along with the business practices of two traffickers, the film delivers a fairly complete picture of how this industry works from one end to the other. As is the case with thousands of other kids, Aya was "recruited" by a trafficker who convinced her economically desperate parents that she would get a good-paying job in Thailand. Once Aya turned up at the appointed place and time, however, her passport was confiscated and she was sold to a man in Thailand who regularly beat and raped her, resulting in pregnancy. Rescued by Thai police, Aya was ultimately sent back home along with her unwanted child whom—she confesses late in the film—she often hits in revenge for what the toddler's father did to her. Meanwhile, the two traffickers who agreed to be filmed and interviewed here carry on their criminal activities with impunity. Presenting a startling and terrifying glimpse of the daily realities of the slave trade in at least one corner of the world, this disturbing documentary is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

flags everywhere. In city council and zoning meetings, the white mayor is hostile towards any suggestion that she or this unfolding situation is tied to racism, while community activists fail to obtain a "historic site" preservation status for their streets. Meanwhile, the college students living in the unwanted frat house are rattled by these developments. One well-spoken young man pushes back against the racism charge by expressing his idealization of the stereotypical "Southern gentleman" as someone who values his good name and reputation. Eventually, some common ground emerges when the students—in search of volunteerism opportunities—are invited to help locals build a community garden, which results in people from both sides starting to talk to one another. A surprisingly hopeful documentary that begins with a portrait of a community dividing itself along polarized racial lines but ends on a symbol of possibility, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Salam Neighbor ★★★

(2015) 75 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$250: public libraries; \$400: colleges & universities. Tugg. DRA. PPR.

While the exodus of Syrian refugees into Europe has recently enflamed debate, their flight has been ongoing for years, resulting in numerous U.N.-operated camps that have become virtual cities in adjacent countries. The stresses that these encampments place on the host nations (as well as the U.N. budget) have mostly been discussed in emotionally detached numerical terms. Here, American filmmakers Chris Temple and Zach Ingrasci humanize the situation by living for a month in the Za'atari camp in Jordan, recording the experience. In reality, the pair occupy their tent only during daylight—fears for their

safety require that they sleep in the nearby town of Mafraq. But that proves beneficial, since they are able to interview Syrians trying to survive there as well. What emerges is a stirring portrait of struggling residents, including a couple who have lost two sons to the war, a single mother who is trying to raise her children, and a former student who channels his energy into helping others. But the most poignant figure here is Raouf, an ebullient 10-year-old who becomes the filmmakers' dedicated helper. Only late in *Salam Neighbor* is it revealed that Raouf's refusal to go to class stems from trauma he suffered when his school in Syria was bombed. The insular tone adopted by some of the current American presidential candidates may make the film's plea—that America should do more to help the displaced, including inviting them to the United States—a hard sell, but it's a message that should be heard. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Women of '69, Unboxed ★★★

(2015) 59 min. DVD: \$49.95 (\$250 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Nineteen women who graduated from Skidmore College in 1969 and recently turned 65 are profiled in this talking-heads documentary by filmmaker Peter Barton, which serves up another portrait of aging boomers looking back on their heady school days. At the heart of the film is a relic of those times: a Skidmore "yearbook" that replaced the conventional yearbook and consisted of artistic portraits of students, full of free-spiritedness and promise. What emerges is a sense of how much American culture was changing in the latter half of the '60s: the prim and proper Skidmore girls who entered the 1964 freshman class would soon be standing up

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to campus authorities on the subjects of free expression, alcohol, sex, and more. Five years later, everything was different, as issues of pursuing a career or motherhood—or juggling both—became paramount for some of these women after college. An interesting, collective story that serves as a microcosm of American life for women during a time of great change (1969 was also the year that Hillary Clinton graduated from Wellesley College) and during ensuing decades, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

TEEN ISSUES

Why Do Bullies Bully? ★★★

(2015) 30 min. DVD: \$64.95. DRA. TMW Media Group. PPR.

Former teacher and anti-bullying expert Keith Deltano (host of *The Complete Anti-Bullying Kit*, reviewed in VL-1/16) is briefly featured here in lecture clips, but the bulk of *Why Do Bullies Bully?* is comprised of interviews with students who talk about dealing with bullies. Adding personal opinion to the mix (one girl heartbreakingly says that bullies prey on victims by “making them feel like they don’t have a place on Earth”), this guidance program centers on the psychology of bullies, who may be envious, often have misplaced anger, and are usually insecure. Noting that bullies tend to project their own issues onto others, the participants offer suggestions on how to stand up and be part of the solution. Also featuring an online resource guide, this is recommended. Aud: J, H, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

EDUCATION

Some Kind of Spark ★★★

(2014) 85 min. DVD: \$100; public libraries; \$250; colleges & universities. Argot Pictures. PPR.

Aside from its regular curriculum, New York’s Juilliard School also offers a two-year program for inner-city kids ages 8-12. Director Ben Niles spent three years with several Music Advancement Program (MAP) students, including Pete, a soft-spoken charmer who plays the flute, and Ami, an ebullient bass player who sings with her church choir. Pete moved to the United States in the wake of the Haitian earthquake. Although he never played the flute before, Pete gets off to a good start, only to fall behind in the second year, because he had little time to practice over the summer. Ami takes inspiration from Grammy Award-winning singer and bass player Esperanza Spalding. Explaining her attraction to the stand-up bass, she says, “It’s tall and I’m tall. It just says, ‘I’m here.’” Other subjects include Rahman (trombone), Kari (violin), and Alejandro (drums and percussion). Niles

spends as much time with the kids at home as he does at school, offering insights into their challenges and extracurricular interests. In many ways, *Some Kind of Spark* plays like the opposite of the 2014 film *Whiplash*, where a music school teacher browbeats a student into greatness; here, the teachers can be stern, but are always aware that they are dealing with kids who will need encouragement in order to persevere and improve. At the end of the second year, the students must decide whether to audition for MAP’s more rigorous third year. While not every student takes that step, it’s clear that MAP has benefited all of them in lasting ways. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

LAW & CRIME

Arresting Power ★★1/2

(2015) 84 min. DVD: \$40 (\$125 w/PPR); public libraries; \$250 w/PPR; colleges & universities. DRA. Collective Eye. Closed captioned.

A timely documentary, given the widespread criticism of police killings of black males, co-filmmakers Jodi Darby, Julie Perini, and Erin Yanke’s *Arresting Power* presents a dismal rap sheet of bad behavior by officers in Portland, OR. The film’s political stance is summed up by interviewee/author Kristian Williams, who doesn’t want police reform but rather the outright abolition of police. Declaring that Oregon was founded as a white supremacist haven with anti-black laws remaining on the books almost up to contemporary times, the filmmakers examine past cases of police brutality and bullying, including an instance in which a despondent, bereaved black man was shot while a counselor was en route to help him, and another involving a black Marine who had just foiled a robbery only to be fatally choked by cops who assumed that he was the criminal. And then there was the “possum incident,” in which white cops dumped dead animals at a black-owned business for fun and seemed amazed that anyone took offense. According to activists and civil-rights figures, a powerful union protects these bad guys in blue (although no police spokesmen appear on camera). Subtitled “Resisting Police Violence in Portland, Oregon,” extras include a film premiere Q&A, bonus interviews, and a study guide. A low-budget (especially evident in some poor audio) documentary specifically aimed at Portland viewers, this should still be considered a strong optional purchase elsewhere due to the subject matter. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Pull of Gravity ★★

(2015) 80 min. DVD: \$50 (\$150 w/PPR); public libraries; \$295 w/PPR; colleges & universities. DRA. Collective Eye. Closed captioned.

The “gravity” in the title of this docu-

You Belong to Me: Sex, Race and Murder on the Suwannee River ★★★

(2015) 88 min. DVD: \$19.95. Vision Films (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmaker John Cork's grim documentary tells an unusual story of racial injustice, with many a surprising development extending over two decades. In 1952, Ruby McCollum, a well-educated and relatively affluent African-American mother of four in Live Oak, FL, shot and killed Dr. Clifford Leroy Adams in his own office. The murder of Adams, a white man, was officially tied to an argument over a \$116 medical bill, and McCollum stood trial before an all-white jury and judge. McCollum's attorney did not fight the charge but rather the perceived motive, arguing that McCollum did not kill Adams over a bill, but because he had raped her repeatedly and fathered a child by her. Most of this evidence was ruled inadmissible by the judge, who even went so far as to order the jury not to look at the child when she was in the courtroom. McCollum was found guilty and sentenced to be executed, but her story became even more complex with the entrance of two dogged journalists (one being Zora Neale Hurston) whose investigations were stymied by the same judge. Combining archival materials with interviews of many people familiar with the case (including one of the jurors, and members of McCollum's family), *You Belong to Me* is a disturbing story of race and justice in the Jim Crow-era American South. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



mentary relates to recidivism, as many released prisoners soon find themselves incarcerated again after a failed attempt to return to society. The film focuses on three Philadelphia men struggling to reboot their lives after years of criminal activity and time behind bars. El Sawyer, one of the men in the spotlight, shares director credit with Jon Kaufman. In many ways, the odds are stacked against these men: 67 percent of released ex-offenders wind up back in prison within three years, creating a never-ending loop in which career criminals become career convicts. All three men share very similar problems: a tumultuous upbringing in poverty-stricken neighborhoods, minimal education and no marketable skills, and networks of friends who offer the worst possible camaraderie (many having also served time in prison). The family members, peers, and parole officers of the spotlighted subjects are interviewed, but no one seems to be deeply concerned with scope of the problem, and even the three men seem fairly lackadaisical about their respective crises, rarely showing any great remorse for their actions. *Pull of Gravity* was obviously created with the best of intentions—clearly, a solution needs to be found for the recidivism revolving door—but it's hard to feel much sympathy for the irresponsible individuals profiled here. Optional. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

NATURE, MATH & SCIENCE

Bluebird Man ★★★1/2

(2014) 28 min. DVD: \$26.95: public libraries; \$49: high schools; \$100: colleges & universities. DRA. Green Planet Films. PPR.

A touching documentary on the effective

application of citizen science, *Bluebird Man* tells the story of Alfred Larson (now in his mid-90s) and his late wife Hilda, who took their senior passion for a dwindling species of native birds in the remote mountains in the borderlands of Idaho and Oregon and helped stage a remarkable comeback. The bluebirds, indigenous to the area, were fighting a losing battle at the beaks and claws of other birds such as sparrows and starlings that were introduced to the continent during the colonization of the Americas. With passion, kindness, and simple hard work, Larson has built small birdhouses (to serve as the "voids" that are found naturally in some trees), which he has distributed across the region, and tended for more than 35 years. This has entailed tagging to keep tabs on the birds' breeding process and lifecycles (ensuring that there are actual hatching chicks and healthy adult birds). Larson, who is believed to have banded more than 27,000 bluebirds, is a remarkable figure who illustrates the power of one individual to change the world for the good. Extras include additional scenes, and segments from the TV series *Outdoor Idaho*. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (C. Block)

Inhabit: A Permaculture Perspective

★★★1/2

(2014) 92 min. DVD: \$39.95 (\$125 w/PPR): public libraries & high schools; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. DRA. Collective Eye. Closed captioned.

Director Costa Boutsikaris's informative documentary centers on various designs for sustainable ecosystems, which are sometimes found in unexpected places. The governing idea is to create a symbiotic relationship between biology and technology that maximizes yield while



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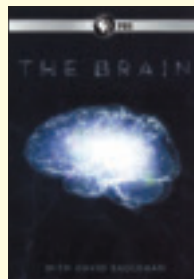
The people of a Berlin suburb join forces to rid their town of more than 300 undetonated bombs dropped by Allied forces during WWII.

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The Brain ★★½

(2015) 2 discs. 360 min. DVD: \$34.99 (\$64.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-470-8.

The human brain—a sealed, isolated chamber—is “nature’s perplexing masterpiece,” a window to the outside world, and director of everything we do. This six-part PBS-aired miniseries, hosted by Dr. David Eagleman, takes viewers on a tour of the brain, the “ultimate storyteller.” Electrochemical signals are the “common currency of the brain,” sorting streams of data in a “massive mind mash.” Unlike other animals, humans are helpless at birth, but the brain relies on sensory information (smell, touch, seeing, and hearing) to build a lifetime of experience. Eagleman notes that Romanian orphans who were forced to live their early years deprived of most sensory stimulation or human contact suffered ill effects that could persist years later. Humans are social animals, so the brain can provide tools for empathy, or succumb to the group contagion of hate, stereotyping, bullying, and even genocide. Other topics covered here include the teen brain and its struggle with impulse control; the automatic, unconscious actions of our brain; the question of free will; decision making; the importance of our “gut feelings”; memory; and aging. The final episode features speculation about the future, ranging from cryogenic “brain preservation” to the possibility that we may become non-biological beings in which our brains, if not our bodies, survive our death. Eagleman clearly and enthusiastically explains associated concepts, ranging from a boy’s amazing ability to quickly perform intricate cup stacking, to how human desire for instant gratification can lead us to ignore dire consequences. Released in conjunction with Eagleman’s companion book, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)



using low-impact tools such as rain tanks and manmade bee hives. *Inhabit* visits a number of sites where permaculture—short for “permanent agriculture”—is working remarkably well. An outdoor laboratory in Vermont regularly experiments with different means of enhancing productivity in vegetable and fruit gardens by spreading rainwater through simple ditches running downhill, without any pipes or equipment. Another farmer uses certain plants that attract pollinators—i.e., helpful insects—that in turn enrich the soil and deliver robust kale and other crops. In the suburbs, where 40 million acres of American lawns absorb 3,000 tons of pesticide every year, some homeowners are beginning to implement permaculture practices in order to grow their own food. Some of the most interesting material here involves permaculture in cities, especially rooftops (which soak up rainwater and help decrease the volume of water flowing into gutters) and in playgrounds, where kids can healthfully snack on fruit and vegetables growing onsite. Offering an inspiring look at sustainable agriculture practices for those willing to partner with nature, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)

A River Between Us ★★½

(2015) 90 min. DVD: \$39; public libraries; \$89; high schools; \$225; colleges & universities. DRA. Green Planet Films. PPR.

Filmmaker J. Martin’s painful but enlightening documentary tells the story of historical conflict over the Klamath River,

a major waterway running from an upper basin in Eastern Oregon to the Pacific coast in Northern California. Before the arrival of white settlers, the Klamath was at the core of a way of life for multiple Native American tribes. Over time, the newcomers re-routed parts of the river, drained it for irrigation, polluted it with industry, and filled it with the debris of deforestation—all of which significantly reduced the salmon population and deeply affected the tribes. Damming up the Klamath in multiple locations made things far, far worse—warming the cold water (which is necessary for salmon) in lakes that were formed by the dams. During the 1970s, conflicts between tribes with legal rights to fish vs. farmers and loggers came to a crisis point, with the federal government stepping in to create the Endangered Species Act and the courts supporting the tribes. All sides were hit by further federal decisions that wound up damaging both farmers and then tribal fishing, setting the stage for protracted negotiations between all parties to find a workable compromise about how to save the dying Klamath. *A River Between Us* includes interviews with former Oregon governors, current Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, tribal representatives, farmers, and others who have a stake in this tragic issue. While not fully resolved, however, there is reason—as the film demonstrates—to be hopefully optimistic about the future fate of the mighty Klamath River. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)

Bite Size ★★½

(2015) 90 min. DVD: \$24.99. Bond/360 (avail. from www.amazon.com).

In this *cinéma vérité* look at America’s child obesity epidemic, director Corbin Billings eschews interviewing authorities and eminences wearing white lab coats, instead specifically concentrating on four adolescents from different backgrounds who are struggling with weight-related health problems and issues. Davion’s girth makes him a candidate for diabetes and an early grave, but he is more worried about his endangered standing on the school football team, not only because of his health problems but also because of his raging outbursts at being bullied for being “fat.” KeAnna equates eating whatever she wants with empowered confidence, even as school health advisors try to set her straight (and cope with the loss of exercise gear due to budget cuts). Moises is the computer-gamer/film-fan son of a macho dad who criticizes his couch-potato ways; ironically, it’s the active, slim father whose bad eating habits catch up with him first. Emily is no longer morbidly obese, but only thanks to long, expensive therapy, coupled with discipline imposed by her parents. The moral of the narrative here is that the kids aren’t in this alone, and families and peer groups should clean up their own diets and unhealthy habits as well. Bonus features include a cartoon. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

States of Grace ★★½

(2014) 74 min. DVD: \$95; public libraries, \$350; colleges & universities; Blu-ray: \$120; public libraries, \$375; colleges & universities. New Day Films. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-57448-401-4 (dvd), 978-1-57448-402-1 (blu-ray).

Dr. Grace Dammann, a high-profile San Francisco physician and clinic founder who is revered in AIDS and humanitarian circles, was severely mangled in a car crash on the Golden Gate Bridge in 2008. Having long ministered to others in crises, she is now an invalid, relying on her longtime domestic partner turned full-time caregiver Nancy “Fu” Schroeder, while also coping with the dawning adolescence of their adopted daughter Sabrina (who is herself afflicted with cerebral palsy). These strong women belong to a supportive California Zen Buddhist community (author Isabel Allende is part of their circle of friends), but the torturous programs of therapy and rehabilitation test their loyalties severely. Filmmakers Mark Lipman and Helen S. Cohen’s *States of Grace* not only shows the dynamics of a non-traditional American family but also probes the limits of the caregiver/patient relationship, where fatigue and desperation can set in even among individuals who seem formidably armed—both intellectually and spiritually—to meet the challenges. A power-

Spotlight on Fitness

Couples Workouts for Health and Happiness: Core & Flexibility ★★★

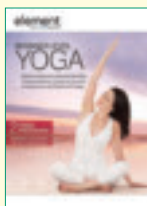
(2015) 35 min. DVD: \$14.99. BayView Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Fitness instructor and couples therapist Gina Guddat demonstrates with the help of partner Larry Berg in this exercise program designed for two people. "Stay active! Stay healthy! Stay together!" is the motto here, and while the unlit candelabra in the apartment backdrop comes across as a tad corny, the idea that couples can help each other with balance while also improving their relationship seems solid. Featuring a warm-up with stretching twists, hamstring pulls, and knee-lifts, *Core & Flexibility* incorporates a lot of mat work, including three levels of lean backs (with rounded back and holding on to thighs), oblique lean backs (with joined hands), tap pulses, reverse crunch and leg extensions, oblique hip lifts, three varieties of plank moves measured by time not reps, and a "super couple" low back lift. Also featuring stretching segments for hamstrings, back ("dead bug stretch"), and legs, this is recommended. [Note: also newly available in the *Couples Workouts for Health and Happiness* series are *Cardio Sweat* and *Strength & Tone Together*.] Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Element: Beginner Level Yoga ★★★

(2015) 78 min. DVD: \$14.98. Anchor Bay Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.



This latest addition to the extensive library of *Element* exercise titles is hosted by Hollywood trainer Alanna Zabel. Filmed in front of a soothing Shangri-la ocean backdrop, *Beginner Level Yoga* includes two routines. "The Foundations Program" incorporates various Hatha postures for flexibility and strength-building, with Zabel coaxing viewers to "imagine your feet are like roots of a plant" for moves including mountain pose, warrior, table top, plank (half, full, and modified), sphinx, cobra, and child's pose. "The Slow Flow Program"

ties together the poses and includes cat/cow, downward facing dog, reverse, and bridge, along with a bonus "Guided Meditation" at the close. Offering tips for modifications while focusing on "self-care" and restoring one's energy, this beginner's instructional guide is recommended. [Note: also newly available in the *Element* series are *Cardio & Conditioning Yoga* and *Targeted Toning Yoga*.] Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Kathy Smith: FastFit 10-Minute Miracle ★★★1/2

(2013) 50 min. DVD: \$14.99. BayView Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Longtime fitness maven Kathy Smith adds to her extensive library of exercise programs with this collection of 10-minute mix-and-match workouts. Offering an intro overview of this regimen that incorporates dumbbells and is designed for "maximum results in minimum time," *FastFit 10-Minute Miracle* features Smith and four participants (one demonstrating modifications) going through "Body Basics," with squat, rear-dip lunge, bicep curl, pike, and curl pulse moves; "Total Body Toner," which focuses on strength-training combos with rows, dips, shoulder press, triceps kick, and curtsy squat; "Fat Burning Blast," centering on cardio with standing crunches and pivot combos; and "Flat Abs Fast" (called "Miracle Abs" on the DVD box), which includes mat work moves such as cannonball, side crunches, and Superman position. Finishing up with a "Stretch & Flex" segment for "when you want to rejuvenate throughout the day," this fine entry in the long-running series is highly recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Leslie Sansone—Just Walk: Walking Off the Pounds ★★★

(2015) 66 min. DVD: \$14.98. Anchor Bay Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Upbeat instructor Leslie Sansone is back with this latest addition to her indoor walking series, featuring a trio of segments that when combined add up to a three-mile workout (around 15 minutes per mile). Backed by a group of 10 women and men who spiritedly

mirror Sansone's moves and energy, *Walking Off the Pounds* presents a warm-up intro with walking in place, sidestep, kicks, knee lifts, and side taps. Noting "it does not matter if it's right or left, you can't do this program wrong," Sansone and crew incorporate arm reaches, hip touches, hamstring curls, lunges, turns, hip swivels, and step-taps, adding intensity and speed along the way. Also featuring a cool-down walk and the mat-based "Healthy Abs & Back Session," this solid program finds Sansone offering tips and encouragement throughout, reminding viewers that "any time you feel like walking, it's the right time." Recommended. [Note: also newly available in the *Leslie Sansone—Just Walk* series is *5 Boosted Miles!*] Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Simplified Tai Chi for Beginners ★★★

(2015) 140 min. DVD: \$29.95. YMAA Publication Center (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-59439-292-4.



Vancouver-based tai chi master Helen Liang hosts this detailed primer on the 24-posture short form of tai chi, derived from the ancient long form over the years for a simplified and standardized practice. Liang provides a walkthrough of the moves in a garden setting before heading into a studio with a white background, where she explains underlying philosophy and guidelines (tying in the head, eyes, and torso to center the focus; paying attention to body placement in order to avoid injury) as she goes through the five sections of instructions for moves that include "Wild Horse Parts Its Mane," "Repulse Monkey," and "Grasp the Sparrow's (Peacock's) Tail." Providing front and rear views, along with help from Master Chenhan Yang, this challenging but comprehensive beginner's guide to short form tai chi is recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Coming Soon

Jillian Michaels: Hot Body, Healthy Mommy (Gaiam, DVD: \$14.98, avail. Mar. 15). Fitness personality Jillian Michaels hosts this exercise compilation that includes three workouts designed for new mothers.



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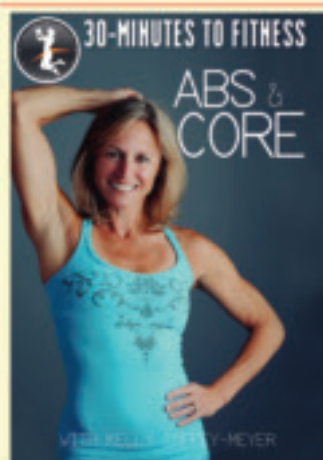
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ful documentary that touches on numerous subjects—medical, biographical, religious,

and LGBT—this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

CHILDBIRTH & PARENTING

The Mama Sherpas ★★★

(2015) 77 min. DVD: \$24.99. Bond/360 (avail. from www.amazon.com).

Director Brigid Maher decided to make a film about midwives after having one child by Cesarean section and another by vaginal birth (the former was a disappointing experience; the latter was not). As in previous documentaries from producers Ricki Lake and Abby Epstein (*The Business of Being Born*, *Breastmilk*), Maher here draws attention to unnecessary medical procedures that benefit hospitals at the expense of patients, but she focuses on practices across the country where midwives collaborate with doctors. Whitney Pinger, a certified nurse midwife (CNM) at George Washington University Hospital, serves as a bridge between obstetricians and patients (an inter-title explains that certified midwives are authorized to practice in five states, while CNMs provide care in all 50 states). Pinger believes that America's 30% Cesarean rate is too high—particularly since the World Health Organization recommends a rate of 15% (fewer C-sections result in a lower infant mortality rate). With proper training, Dr. Annette Fineberg at Sutter Medical Group believes it is just as safe to deliver twins and breech babies vaginally, although doctors routinely perform C-sections in those instances. *The Mama Sherpas* features several actual births, including a water birth and a breech birth. In one case involving a Somali immigrant, a midwife recommends a C-section because the patient has diabetes and other risk factors. While it isn't what she wants, the woman realizes that it's in her baby's best interest, so she assents. This incident underscores Maher's point that while there is nothing fundamentally wrong with C-sections, their frequency in American hospitals has grown out of control. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)



RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY

Sticky: A (Self) Love Story ★★★

(2015) 71 min. DVD: \$19.95. Vision Films (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmaker Nicholas Tana's documentary about masturbation approaches the subject from various angles, beginning with historical evidence that autoeroticism has always been a part of the human experience. From here, the discussion shifts to American society's discomfort with the topic, as evidenced by the scandals surrounding such celebrities as Pee-wee Herman, who was arrested for allegedly polishing the bishop (yes, the film features an array of slang terms) in an adult theater. *Sticky* also looks at a slew of political downfalls resulting from all manner of sex scandal, not just masturbation. Pornography as an aid to masturbation is discussed by *Hustler* magazine publisher Larry Flynt, but the film is more interesting when it travels down unexpected roads, such as a look at female masturbation emerging as a kind of cultural-political right, championed by the feminist movement of the 1970s, with self-love becoming a form of self-validation in an oppressive society. Also covered are cultural myths linking masturbation to sociopathic behavior. Other interviewees include actress

Janeane Garofolo, porn star turned sex educator Nina Hartley, and Clinton-era Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, who was forced to resign after she advocated for the teaching of masturbation in schools. Accurately labeled with a DVD cover tag reading "Warning: Contains Graphic Material," this is recommended for more adventurous collections. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

FOOD & SPIRITS

A Few Good Pie Places ★★★

(2015) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-486-9.

The American cultural staple of pie is the subject of this look at tasty desserts served at popular locales across the country. Touting pie's elements of comfort, flavor, and simplicity, enthusiasts here call it "the perfect food," noting that due to the fruit, "it's practically good for you." Narrated by Rick Sebak, this PBS-aided food travelogue takes viewers to spots including Portage Pie in Westfield, NY, where the Thayer family brags about having made a pie for Ken Burns; Ikeda's Country Market in Auburn, CA, which features enormously-domed apple pies; Portland, ME, to enjoy Two Fat Cats whoopee pies; and Virginia's Woodruff's Store, a gospel-filled

home to sweet potato and fried pies. From a self-service honor system set up at Vermont's Poorhouse Pies, to Seattle's A la Mode bakery's "Blue Hawaiian" signature pie, and more, *A Few Good Pie Places* wraps up with Pie Day festival events in Minnesota. Also including bonus featurettes, this mouthwatering foodie road trip is recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Just Eat It ★★½

(2015) 73 min. DVD: \$350. Peg Leg Films (dist. by Bullfrog Films). PPR. SDH captioned. ISBN: 1-94154-548-3.

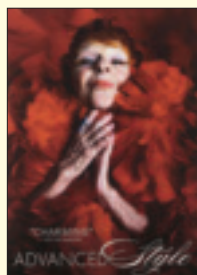
In a headline-grabbing stunt that would be funny if it weren't so sobering, Canadian filmmaking couple Jen Rustemeyer and Grant Baldwin, after learning that 40 percent of all food in North America goes to waste, determined to live for six months off discards (with perhaps occasional handouts from family and friends). The couple's docu-diary accompanies interview sidebars from the likes of authors Jonathan Bloom and Tristram Stuart, along with farmers and insiders, about the culture of wretched excess and corporate pathology (bigger portions, more food than is needed) that results in millions of tons of edibles being consigned to trash bins. In fact, the protagonists' dumpster-diving leaves them overwhelmed with more than they could possibly eat (and Grant gains an unflattering amount of weight). Presenting both the full-length documentary and a 50-minute abridged version, extras include a study guide. Offering real food for thought in a hungry world, this engaging and informative film is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (C. Cassidy)

BEAUTY & FASHION

Handmade with Love in France ★★★

(2014) 70 min. DVD: \$99.95; public libraries; \$350: colleges & universities. The Cinema Guild. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-7815-1529-7.

The prevailing myth is that couture apparel costs more because a designer's name is attached, but the reality is that the clothing takes longer to make, no matter how high the mark-up. Director Julie Georgia Bernard profiles three French craft houses that bring designer concepts to life. In all cases, the artisans stress that they cannot rush their work, while also noting that they receive little respect (they miss the days when they dealt directly with designers rather than brand representatives). Gérard Lognon specializes in pleats that have adorned runway models for Chanel and Dior. He named one of his workrooms after Hermès, since he's pleated millions of their carré scarves. Lognon is so firmly rooted in the past that he brags about the number of cigarettes he smokes and takes pride in his ignorance of



Advanced Style ★★★

(2014) 72 min. DVD: \$19.99. Bond/360 (avail. from www.amazon.com).

Advanced Style slots neatly between *Bill Cunningham New York* (VL-9/11) and Albert Maysles's *Iris* (VL-9/15), since the documentary celebrates fashionable New York women who are over 60. If photographer Cunningham casts his net widely, blogger Ari Seth Cohen gravitates towards more eccentric style mavens, like Iris Apfel, star of *Iris* (who also appears here). Cohen says he launched his blog shortly after moving to New York: everywhere he went, he noticed older women treating the city's sidewalks like their own personal runway, and he took inspiration from their confidence and creativity. Director Lina Plioplyte profiles seven women, ranging in age from 62 to 95. Not all are wealthy, but all spend a substantial portion of their income on clothing. They see themselves as artists, although 93-year-old Ilona Royce Smithkin actually teaches on the subject (her portrait of Ayn Rand adorns many of Rand's books). Tziporah Salamon, 62, works in a vintage shop, so she has access to many unique items, although it can take her years to construct the perfect outfit. Debra Rapaport, 67, saves money by making her own bracelets, which add to her sculptural look. Thanks to Cohen's blog and ensuing book, the ladies here become stars, and Plioplyte captures their photo shoots and talk show appearances. The tone throughout is buoyant, so much so that a death at the end barely registers, but then Cohen's coterie does take a Holly Golightly approach to life: have fun, look great, and don't stop dancing until the music stops. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

computers (conducting all of his business in person or over the phone). Lorenzo Ré constructs hats for designers such as Philip Treacy. For each one, Ré creates wooden molds that he drills and sands by hand. Bruno Légeron, a fourth-generation craftsman, applies feathers and fake flowers to clothing for Lanvin and Balenciaga. He has managed Maison Légeron for 35 years, although some of his employees have been with the business even longer. His is one of three such houses in Paris, where there used to be dozens. All three of Bernard's subjects lack successors, and they worry about the future of their ateliers. Some of their peers have already sold their businesses to Chanel and Dior, but at the expense of autonomy. According to Lognon, if he sold out to Chanel, he would "cease to exist." An interesting niche portrait of a little-seen aspect of haute couture, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

COMPUTERS & TECHNOLOGY

Dreams Rewired ★★★

(2015) 85 min. DVD: \$29.98 (\$398 w/PPR from www.icarusfilms.com). Icarus Films Home Video (available from most distributors, Mar. 22). PPR. Closed captioned.

Tilda Swinton narrates co-directors Manu Luksch, Martin Reinhart, and Thomas Tode's experimental documentary that draws on archival film clips to shed light on today's wired world—revisiting communications innovations of the past, beginning with the telephone and ending with the computer. Instead of serving

up facts and figures, the film emphasizes thoughts and impressions, making for a dreamlike journey through the 20th century, although Swinton does focus on a few notable figures, such as Alice Guy, a Gaumont secretary who became the first director of narrative features, and Sergei Eisenstein, the Russian filmmaker who used cross-cutting to stir the emotions. Although the filmmakers don't identify the clips, which come mostly from national archives, some familiar faces appear, such as Charlie Chaplin in a 1984-like sequence from *Modern Times*, and Julian West in Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr* (the end credits list over 200 films). As the telephone became widely available, new jobs opened up for women, with switchboard operators helping to establish these connections. With the invention of the Dictaphone, secretaries were able to record a boss's messages, saving time and increasing efficiency. Radio, TV, and film also connected people, the latter whether they watched motion pictures in a theater or shared home movies with friends and family. The computer served as a business aid in the post-war years, long before it was as ubiquitous in homes as radio and TV—devices that computers have either supplanted, wed, or incorporated. And on a poetic note, Swinton says that "the city is transformed into the largest set of all time." Of course, the inter-connective wonders of technology have also come at a price, including reduced privacy and increased surveillance on the part of the government and other interested parties. A thought-provoking, meditative film, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

**"A beautifully filmed,
absorbing, and inspirational
portrait of two remarkable athletes,
this is highly recommended."**

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SPORTS, GAMES & RECREATION

Back on Board: Greg Louganis ★★★

(2015) 87 min. DVD: \$59.95 (\$350 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

This HBO-aided documentary about four-time Olympic gold medal award-winning high-diver Greg Louganis—who was once a household name—opens with the star athlete's California home in foreclosure. Even as he won unprecedented honors in the sport throughout the 1980s, Louganis felt hostility from peers not just for his homosexuality (an open secret in the dive community) but also because of his Cold War friendships with competing high-divers from the U.S.S.R. (earning Louganis the pejorative "commie fag"). Lucrative commercial-endorsement deals failed to materialize, which would have been a different story if Louganis were straight, says a former coach here. While breathtaking Olympic feats took place in the public eye, bad management and regrettable personal/business relationships behind the scenes culminated in Louganis disclosing his HIV-positive status to the public on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 1995, following up with a candid 1996 memoir, *Breaking the Surface*. Although media judgment was harsh (a head wound during a dangerous dive could have exposed bystanders to the champ's tainted blood), the LGBT community embraced Louganis's candor. Here, filmmaker Cheryl Furjanic parallels Louganis's symbolic redemption on the games circuit (he now advises young Olympians) with recent breakthroughs in gay rights. A solid sports profile with added LGBT interest, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

CRAFTS, ARTS & HOBBIES

Pedestal Dining Table ★★★1/2

(2015) 100 min. DVD: \$19.95. The Taunton Press (dist. by The AV Cafe). PPR. ISBN: 978-1-63186-457-5.

Would-be Nick Offermans (let alone Ron Swansons—both Swanson and his *Parks and Recreation* character Nick share a love of fine woodworking) will enjoy this detailed instructional video on how to construct a beautiful pedestal dining table. Part of the acclaimed *Fine Woodworking* video workshop series, this program features woodworker Timothy Rousseau, who takes viewers from inspiration to completion, covering all points in-between. Rousseau lays out the tools and shares techniques for potentially tricky processes such as working with mortise-and-tenon joints, gluing pieces together, and hand-shaping the wood. Like many art forms, good woodworkers put their intellect, heart, and soul into their pieces—qualities that some believe are transferred to the completed works. I've certainly felt that with a few guitars (the good ones that a guitar player "bonds" with). Also featuring a digital plan for the table, this excellent how-to is highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

THE ARTS

Amy Schumer: Live at the Apollo ★★★

(2015) 65 min. HBO Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). DVD: \$19.98. Closed captioned.

Late in this HBO Comedy Special, superstar comedienne Amy Schumer admits to being considered a sexually-oriented standup



Walk On ★★★

(2013) 82 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$125; public libraries & high schools; \$250; colleges & universities. Walk On (avail. from www.walkondocumentary.com). PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-4951-6479-8.

With behind-the-scenes assists from Hollywood-celeb producers (such as actor Alfred Molina, who also appears here), director Mark Bashian's documentary reminds viewers that the HIV virus, AIDS, and unprotected sex are all still vital public-health issues, as well as sources of ignorance and fear, even though the disease has faded from the public awareness since the panic-ridden 1990s. The film's virtue lies in the way it embeds its messages in an inspiring personal sports narrative: California's Joseph Kibler was born with the virus (following infidelity by his late father), while his twin brother died in infancy. Joseph was initially unable to walk, but now manages short distances—with supreme effort and determination—using a cane. Addressing school groups and training for a six-mile AIDS walk in L.A., Joseph meets other individuals who have conquered disabilities, although not necessarily AIDS-related (such as a wheelchair-bound casualty of a rock-climbing mishap, who is now an award-winning "standup" comic). Joseph also talks with comic actress Regina Hall (whose Q&A about Joseph's sex life is simultaneously tacky and highly educational). An entertaining and enlightening documentary, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

comic. Which is both no surprise and also a bit of a revelation, given that during the previous hour or so, while still delivering on the raunch quotient with absolutely no inhibitions, she largely avoids uttering George Carlin's infamous "seven dirty words." Candid about insecurities over her body and being non-supermodel-skeletal, Schumer describes her culture shock going from the East Coast to work in Hollywood, where everyone is incredibly "hot," and a personal trainer worked heroically to get Schumer to lose 10 pounds for her own movie project (unnamed, but clearly *Trainwreck*). Schumer tackles STDs, bodily functions, and euphemistic names for a wild variety of kinky sex acts, sometimes with uproarious, red-faced audience feedback. Filmed at Harlem's legendary Apollo Theater, and directed by Chris Rock, this entertaining standup performance by the current female comic du jour is sure to be popular. Recommended. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)

Cavedigger ★★★

(2015) 39 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$199.99 w/PPR). Dreamscape Media. Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Jeffrey Karoff's Oscar-nominated short documentary serves up a portrait of Ra Paulette, a septuagenarian Taos man who uses hand tools to dig into northern New Mexico's sandstone mountains, as he sculpts elaborate, intricate caves that feature soaring arches, sunroofs, and Art Deco-style filigree—and even sometimes added mirrors to resemble ponds of water. Paulette is clearly a somewhat obsessive man, describing his passion—which he's indulged for a quarter-century—in quiet, almost reverential tones. Although he is untrained in art, architecture, geology, or structural engineering, the resultant caverns are extraordinarily beautiful. Paulette's avocation is not, however, without problems: his work is hardly remunerative, as his supportive wife admits, and the artist repeatedly falls into disagreements with the patrons who do help subsidize his efforts (sometimes for years rather than the months originally agreed upon) when they consider "their" cave finished and he insists on continuing to embellish it at their expense. Cave-ins are also a constant danger: Paulette must abandon one project due to a collapse he only narrowly escapes. Paulette remains undeterred, however, and *Cavedigger* closes with the artist's decision to devote his remaining years to creating a magnum opus that will be a summation of his vision—which might take a decade to complete. Karoff deftly captures Paulette's eccentricity and artistic ambition in gentle, understated fashion in this engaging profile. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

How to Smell a Rose ★★★1/2

(2014) 62 min. DVD: \$19.95. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

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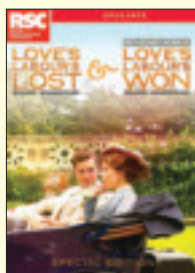
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mentaries about filmmakers will treasure this wonderful late-life profile of Richard "Ricky" Leacock, whose career achievements included camerawork on Robert J. Flaherty's 1948 classic *Louisiana Story* and who revolutionized nonfiction cinema via portable cameras and synchronized sound recording on the landmark 1960 documentary *Primary*. Filmmakers Les Blank and Gina Leibrecht visited with Leacock in 2000 at his farm in Normandy, where the legendary cinema artist offered respectful recollections of his cinematic career—most notably, his work with Robert Drew, D.A. Pennebaker, and the Maysles brothers in developing and perfecting the technology and style that helped bring about the similar "direct cinema" and *cinéma vérité* approaches to filmmaking. But Leacock displays an even greater passion when talking about his love of cooking. Indeed, a surprisingly large portion of the film follows Leacock as he shops for fresh vegetables at a local market, cooks for the camera, and shares amusing stories regarding his efforts to prepare various gourmet dishes. Also prominent are scenes of the elderly but still spirited Leacock enjoying the serenity of the French countryside while observing what makes the experience so special. In some ways, *How to Smell a Rose* is a double send-off of two filmmaking greats: Leacock died in 2011, with Blank passing away two years later. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

I Am What I Play ★★★

(2015) 104 min. DVD: \$59; public libraries; \$299 w/PPR; colleges & universities. Seventh Art Releasing.

Roger King's *I Am What I Play* profiles four major-market disc jockeys, who recount their biographies while also detailing the radio landscape from the 1960s up to today. New York's Meg Griffin, who works at Sirius XM, originally studied to become a veterinarian. On a whim, she gave college radio a try, and was hooked. She dropped out of school and moved up the ranks until she got a job at WNEW, where she embraced the burgeoning punk scene. Similarly, Boston's Charles Laquidara studied art in college before switching to acting. When that didn't pan out, he moved to radio, and found his calling, which led to a gig at WBCN, where he graduated to morning show host. Toronto's David Marsden knew from the start that he wanted to be a DJ, even if his parents didn't consider it a respectable career path. Since he played rock 'n' roll, he created a persona, David Mickie, to match the boisterousness of the music. His first boss didn't like it, but listeners responded favorably, and he became a local celebrity (although he hid his homosexuality in order to stay in the game). Seattle's Pat O'Day bounced around a few stations before he took over the afternoon shift at KJR, where he popularized local acts



Love's Labour's Lost & Love's Labour's Won: Special Edition ★★★1/2

(2015) 2 discs. 288 min. DVD: \$54.99, Blu-ray: \$59.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

The Bard staged in *Downton Abbey* style is both the great attraction and potential downfall of director Christopher Luscombe's 2015 Royal Shakespeare Company double bill. Because Luscombe added a substantial helping of 1920s musical theatre to the mix here, the combination might easily have backfired, but instead proves to be exceptionally agreeable. The inspiration is to treat *Much Ado About Nothing* (presented here as *Love's Labour Won*), a tale of a squabbling couple forced to confess their love through trickery, as a sequel to *Love's Labour's Lost*, which is about friends who vow to abjure romance for scholarship, only to have their commitment sorely tested. Both plays are performed by the same cast (although the characters' names differ), updated to the early 1900s (the first takes place immediately before World War I; the second in the war's aftermath), and set at an elegant country estate. Some of the dialogue, moreover, has been transformed by Nigel Hess into songs sometimes reminiscent of Gilbert and Sullivan and occasionally of Noel Coward, which are nicely handled by the expert cast that is headed by Edward Bennett as Berowne/Benedick and Michelle Terry as Rosaline/Beatrice, with Nick Havernon adding lowbrow humor as Costard/Dogberry. Even those unconvinced by the argument that *Much Ado About Nothing* can serve as a sequel to the earlier *Love's Labour Lost* will likely be disarmed by this splendid mounting, with a 20th-century setting and operetta-like approach that prove to be surprisingly persuasive. Extras include audio commentaries, interviews, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and a cast gallery. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Swietek)

such as the Sonics and Merrilee Rush. O'Day also promoted dances and concerts, which led to an anti-trust lawsuit, although the court cleared him of all charges. All of the DJs here enjoyed their work, but also had to contend with stalkers, substance abuse, and the move towards Internet broadcasting. By embracing some changes (but not all), they found ways to stay relevant. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

The New Rijksmuseum ★★★

(2014) 131 min. In Dutch, English, French & Spanish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$27.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

One might expect a documentary about the Netherlands' premier national museum to concentrate on its masterpieces, such as Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*. But while filmmaker Oeke Hoogendijk affords tantalizing glimpses of such pieces, they are often being moved, prepared for display, or undergoing restoration. The film instead focuses on the countless delays tied to the institution's renovation, which began in 2003 with an expected timeframe of a couple of years but dragged on for nearly a decade. Obstacles include construction-related problems, staff debates about interior arrangements, and budgetary setbacks, but most of the roadblocks here are bureaucratic and political. Intervention by governmental cultural agencies occasionally causes setbacks, but the real major snafu involves angry protests by Amsterdam's bicycle enthusiasts over plans for a new entrance. The cyclists oppose a design that will interfere with their traditional

path through the main building's central courtyard. In 2008, the museum's director resigns, and his successor is left to deal with the matter. The frustration also extends to some staff, although dedicated curators are shown still trying to add to their collections as the process drags on. Hoogendijk's fly-on-the-wall access makes for an intriguing portrait of people struggling with the sorts of issues confronting many public institutions nowadays, although not usually to this extreme. The film ends with the 2013 reopening of the Rijksmuseum, which is presented as a grand celebration, but is truly the result of 10 years of exasperation. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

HISTORY & CURRENT EVENTS

Empire ★★★

(2012) 2 discs. 303 min. DVD: \$49.99. Athena (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62172-228-1.

This five-part 2012 British series, a co-production of the BBC and The Open University, serves up an extended essay on England's imperial history, something that host Jeremy Paxman suggests contemporary Brits tend to be embarrassed about. Offering an overview of the British Empire, which began in the 16th century and was dissolved in the 20th, the recurrent theme here is whether British rule was beneficial or harmful to the areas controlled. Each episode features an overarching subject—power politics, the exporta-

tion of English customs to faraway locales, the thirst for adventure, economic motives, and philanthropic intentions—covering a wide variety of locales, including India, China, the Middle East, Africa, the Caribbean, and Canada (the future U.S. is omitted) in somewhat scattershot fashion. Along the way, intriguing issues are raised (such as the imperial role of English sports—particularly cricket) and excellent thumbnail sketches are presented of key figures, including T.E. Lawrence, Cecil Rhodes, General Charles Gordon, and famed missionary David Livingstone. A wealth of artwork and archival material is supplemented with visits to formerly imperial regions, where Paxman interviews locals (including a Kenyan woman who was a freedom fighter, a couple of elderly English ladies who saw Gandhi, and even the great-grandson of the Mahdi, who besieged Gordon at Khartoum). The overall result is somewhat disjointed and clearly apologetic, with an admission that imperial rule was basically indefensible and often brutal (while arguably also accomplishing some good), but it's also quite informative, featuring many fascinating anecdotes. Extras include a viewer's guide with a timeline, map, and articles. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Henry and Anne: The Lovers Who Changed History ★★½

(2014) 120 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-479-1.

As a young man, King Henry VIII was virile and handsome, living in an age where masculinity was used as a justification for power. A major blot on the king's happiness was his inability to produce a male heir, the repercussions of which not only shook England but also had international consequences. Filmmaker Chris Mitchell's PBS-aired documentary, hosted by Dr. Suzannah Lipscomb, examines the eventful, passionate, and ultimately tragic marriage of Henry and Anne Boleyn. In those days, when love was a political concern, Henry's first wife Catherine's inability to birth a son became known as the "king's great matter," driving Henry to seek a divorce on the grounds that Catherine, previously married to Henry's brother, was a party to sin in the eyes of God, and the couple were punished with no male children. Henry, who had many mistresses, cast his eyes on Anne Boleyn, an attractive, well-connected, flirtatious woman who spent much of her youth in France. In his effort to divorce, Henry eventually bypassed the disapproving Pope, creating and declaring himself head of the Church of England. The marriage was passionate but turbulent, and Lipscomb here examines their letters to one another while visiting important sites in their relationship. When a male child still was not forthcoming, Henry

grew desperate; a subsequent jousting accident caused him constant pain and possibly brain damage, leading to a personality change and increasing brutality. Fanned by court intrigue, Henry accused Anne of affairs and even incest with her brother. A subsequent trial (which Henry did not attend) led to embarrassing disclosures about Henry's alleged lack of skill at lovemaking. More importantly, it also resulted in Anne's execution, which did not end Henry's troubles or violence. Successive marriages finally produced a male heir, but the boy was short-lived and—ironically—it was a woman, Elizabeth I, who would reign, becoming one of England's greatest monarchs. Full of low intrigue, high drama, and historical insights, this documentary covering events fictionalized in the Golden Globe winning PBS miniseries *Wolf Hall* (based on Booker prize winning novels by Hilary Mantel) is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Nuclear Meltdown Disaster ★★½

(2015) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-462-3.

On March 11, 2011, an earthquake in Japan set off a tsunami that damaged the Fukushima I Nuclear Power Plant, resulting in the greatest nuclear disaster since the 1986 catastrophe at Chernobyl. Filmmaker Miles O'Brien's PBS-aired NOVA documentary

details the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima, which was exacerbated by human error (plant workers here offer a harrowing account of how they faced this unprecedented situation). Running parallel to this recap is the story of a second nuclear plant—located several miles from the damaged Fukushima facility—that also experienced the rough weather conditions, but did not sustain massive damage. Also in the spotlight is TEPCO, the company that runs both plants, which found itself tasked with the responsibility of cleaning up the radioactive mess while trying to convince Japan and the wider world of the continuing value of nuclear power. While the film could have devoted more time to an in-depth consideration of the potential long-term health risks created by the nuclear plant's meltdown—not only to Japan, but also to the Pacific Rim nations bathed in radioactive fallout via the atmosphere and ocean waters—it does offer an intelligent examination of how the crisis transpired, as well as an inspiring look at the heroic reactions to this unimaginable scenario. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (P. Hall)

Uyghurs: Prisoners of the Absurd ★★★

(2014) 99 min. DVD: \$225. DRA. National Film Board of Canada. PPR.

The treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, where the U.S. has held so-called

The Bomb ★★★

(2015) 120 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-452-4.

In the late 1930s, development of an atomic bomb suddenly became an urgent national priority in the U.S. after concerned American scientists noted that the Nazis were trying to build one. A letter from Nazi refugee Albert Einstein to President Roosevelt quickly led to the formation of the secret atomic Manhattan Project. Filmmakers Rushmore Denooyer and Kirk Wolfinger's PBS-aired documentary provides an entertaining and informative history of the bomb, with an emphasis on the early days in Los Alamos, NM, where scientists worked under the direction of autocratic leader General Leslie Groves, enduring primitive living conditions in utmost secrecy. In spite of security efforts, German scientist and Communist spy Klaus Fuchs was forwarding classified information on the bomb to the Soviets, America's then-partner and future rival. Although Harry Truman was kept in the dark about the project until after he became president, he accepted the fateful decision to drop bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, horrific acts that helped end the war. America's singular position proved to be short-lived, however, after the Soviets tested a nuclear weapon, opening a Cold War arms race (which lasted for much of the second half of the 20th century). A storm of recriminations would follow, much of it leveled at tormented chief scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer, who was suspected of having Communist sympathies. *The Bomb* looks at the Bikini Atoll tests, as well as near misses in potential nuclear showdowns in Korea and Cuba, which finally led to talks, treaties, and test bans. Along the way, the film effectively conveys the sheer insanity of the "new reality" of the nuclear age, including the infamous "duck and cover" drills, fallout shelters, and idea that having a clean yard and well-maintained house increased the odds for survival. The doctrine of "massive retaliation" (satirized in the black comedy classic *Dr. Strangelove*) finally brought home the futility of nuclear weapons, although concerns remain about bombs falling into the wrong hands. A solid primer on the subject, this is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)



Circle Unbroken: A Gullah Journey from Africa to America

★★★

(2015) 55 min. DVD: \$19.95 (\$24.95 w/PPR). Marshall Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-936134-60-1.

In filmmaker Clark Santee's musical documentary, co-writer and narrator Anita Singleton-Prather tells the story of the Gullah people through song, dance, and re-enactments (for several numbers, she provides lead vocals in a husky alto). In America, the Gullah primarily live in South Carolina, tracing their ancestry to the West African nations of Sierra Leone, Gambia, Senegal, and Angola. In one 18th-century re-enactment, slave traders raid an African village; in another, Southern plantation owners bid for slaves at an auction. Period drawings, paintings, and prints depict the harrowing journey that slaves took from Africa to the New World, during which many died due to overcrowding, malnutrition, and corporal punishment. On the plantations, slaves picked cotton, indigo, and rice—crops similar to those they cultivated in Africa. Singleton-Prather also describes cultural practices, such as weddings (or “jumping the broom”) and Poro, the latter an initiation ritual signifying a boy's transition to manhood. One song, “Peas and Rice,” celebrates two staples of the Gullah diet, while the Yoruba traditional “Funga Alafia” offers glad tidings and hopes for peace. For these sequences, the performers eschew the stage for parks, cemeteries, and other locations. Singleton-Prather also provides an overview of the abolitionist movement, the Underground Railroad, the Civil War, and the Emancipation Proclamation. Towards the end, she mentions the 2015 murders of nine parishioners at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, a sad reminder that racism is far from over. Students of African-American history will find much of interest here. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (K. Fennessy)



“enemy combatants” without trial since 2001, is outrageous in many respects, but the Kafkaesque experience of 22 Uyghurs who were turned in as terrorists in response to bounties announced by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is especially galling. Filmmaker Patricio Henríquez's documentary effectively recounts the story of these Turkic-speaking Muslims, who were persecuted for their involvement in the separatist movement in the Chinese region of Xinjiang, and fled to Afghanistan, only to be captured post-9/11 and sold to America. The men endured up to seven years of captivity in Cuba (and Chinese interrogators were given access to them), before being eventually released to other countries, but scars remain—not only on the men but also on the reputation of the United States. Footage of the interior of the Guantanamo facility is limited but telling, and Henríquez includes extended excerpts from interviews with three of the prisoners, who describe their harrowing ordeal. Also interviewed are Rushan Abbas, who was enlisted by authorities as their translator and quickly became their protector, and Sabin Willett, a Boston bankruptcy lawyer who argued their case in federal court. Henríquez also looks at the Uyghurs' story within the context of President Obama's failed attempt to close the detention camp, using news clips and interviews with Daniel Fried, point man on the doomed effort. Presenting a surreal true story that reflects poorly on both American law and politics, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

TRAVEL & GEOGRAPHY

Volcanoes & Extreme Landscapes

★★★

(2015) 90 min. DVD: \$24.95. Globe Trekker (avail. from most distributors). PPR. ISBN: 1-937103-33-0.

Throughout human history, volcanoes have been a source of fear and fascination. Hosted by Megan McCormick, this Globe Trekker special takes viewers on a tour of the world's mightiest, most active volcanoes. One of the best known is Hawaii's Kīlauea, once considered the home of Pele, a native god. Over thousands of years, volcanic eruptions have increased the size of the islands as molten rock has cooled (Kīlauea lies in the heart of the fabled Pacific “Ring of Fire”). In 1883, a massive eruption of Java's Krakatoa volcano was deemed the loudest sound ever heard on Earth, resulting in a blast that sank ships, while also creating huge, deadly tidal waves that killed thousands (for years afterward, the volcanic ash that spewed into the atmosphere made for spectacular sunsets). Today, Java is one of the most active volcanic zones in the world. Some volcanoes, like Stromboli off the coast of Italy, are in near constant eruption while others, such as Japan's Mt. Fuji, has been dormant for centuries. In 1980, Washington state's Mount St. Helens came to life with a shattering blast that leveled old growth forests and killed over 50 people. Perhaps the most famous volcanic disaster remains the eruption of Italy's Mount

Vesuvius, which buried Pompeii in 79 A.D., preserving a microcosm of Roman society at the height of its power. But in addition to tourism, energy, and soothing hot springs and mud baths, volcanoes also create fertile soil, which leads many to risk the dangers and stay nearby to cultivate crops. One of the most worrisome contemporary volcanoes is La Palma in the Atlantic's Canary Islands: if this super volcano explodes, it could create tsunamis that might wipe out distant cities like Manhattan (this could occur hundreds of years from now—or next Thursday). Likely to appeal to armchair travelers, this is recommended. Aud: P. (S. Rees)

BIOGRAPHY

Alice Walker: Beauty in Truth ★★★1/2

(2013) 84 min. DVD: \$375. Kali Films (avail. from www.alicewalkerfilm.com). PPR.

Deeply informative and spiritually fulfilling, filmmaker Pratibha Parmar's excellent documentary serves up a profile of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker, whose extraordinary journey began in the Jim Crow years of the Deep South, where she was raised in a matchbox house (with paper bags plastered to the walls in lieu of wallpaper) by a mother who stood up to white owners of cotton fields in her determination to educate her children. Alice started writing poems as a means of emotional escape, and ultimately received a scholarship in the early 1960s to Spelman College in Atlanta. There she fretted over whether to jeopardize her standing with the school in order to join Civil Rights marches, but found in historian Howard Zinn—who would be fired from the Spelman faculty for his activism—an early mentor. While still writing, Walker became more active in the Black Power movement. She married white Jewish attorney Melvyn Leventhal (an expansive personality who speaks warmly of his ex-wife in filmed interviews) and had a daughter, feminist writer Rebecca Walker. Walker's years at Ms. magazine in New York were fruitful and she found a black sisterhood of fellow writers. Racial dividing lines at the time were so strong, however, that her marriage to Leventhal did not last. Walker talks about story and poetry collections she wrote before completing the 1982 international bestseller *The Color Purple*, partially based on her grandparents' experiences. Quincy Jones and Steven Spielberg are on hand to discuss the film version, with some additional time devoted to a backlash in the 1980s against the work for associating spousal violence, rape, lesbianism, and incest with African-American characters. The documentary also covers Walker's activism in America, Africa, Gaza, and elsewhere; her more recent writing; and relationships and love affairs. Walker appears to be a liberated spirit, asking what it truly

means to be human and not letting herself be trapped by conventional expectations. Extras include an interview with the director, film premiere Q&A, audio of Walker reading her poem "Remember," and a study guide. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

E.O. Wilson: Of Ants and Men ★★½

(2015) 120 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-448-7.

A champion of conservation and biodiversity, and winner of two Pulitzer prizes, octogenarian naturalist Edward Osborne Wilson has changed how we look at the world. In this PBS-aired documentary from filmmaker Shelley Schulze, Wilson calls himself a "happy man in a terrible century"—a time of environmental degradation that finds humanity seemingly rushing headlong into self-destruction. Raised in rural Alabama, Wilson was always captivated by nature, but an early injury (limiting his vision to one eye) made him concentrate on examining the world's "little things": insects, particularly ants. Wilson was struck by the similarity of ants and humans, who not only share a motivation to build complex societies while working toward common goals, but also both engage in tribalism. Wilson describes tribalism as a "sort of communion," transcending individual selves to create superorganisms, in which ants sacrifice themselves for the common good (illustrated by battles to the death between leaf cutter and termite ants, where "soldiers" die defending the nests). For humans, tribalism has both positive and negative effects. Wilson describes our love of competitive sports, particularly football,

in which archrivals battle with the encouragement of "nubile" female cheerleaders. Humans crave acceptance and security, but the flipside is brutal exclusion, best illustrated by the policies of Nazi Germany. In the twilight of his life, Wilson meditates on our place in the natural world, the need to reclaim the "better angels" of our nature, and the importance of saving other species in order to save ourselves. Offering a fine overview of Wilson's life, work, and the academic controversies concerning his research on sociobiology, this inspiring and informative profile is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Gabo: The Creation of Gabriel Garcia Márquez ★★★

(2015) 90 min. DVD: \$348. Icarus Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

A serviceable documentary profile of revered writer Gabriel Garcia Márquez, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, filmmaker Justin Webster's *Gabo* is notable for interviewing cohorts of Márquez in the South American literary firmament—Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, Juan Gabriel Vásquez, Xavi Ayén—rather than guest Anglo academicians and various celebs. One startling exception: President Bill Clinton, an ardent admirer of Márquez's writings, who says that the author's works affected Clinton's own views on South America. Growing up in a small town in Colombia, Márquez was raised mostly by grandparents, who imbued him with a different vision of life that would nurture his "magical realist" prose style. The young "Gabo" initially worked as a newspaper reporter, and he would repeatedly return

to his journalism roots, even as his novels (including *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*) earned classic status. Late in life Márquez would use his talent to condemn the rise of narcotics and gangsterism in Colombia. Despite the Clinton interview, *Gabo* does not dwell on the State Department's infamous banning of Márquez from entering the U.S. because of his political views. His high-profile friendship with dictator Fidel Castro is described here as a complex love-hate alliance that Márquez often used to help free prisoners from Cuban jails. The great author's script contributions and adaptations for movies and TV are minimized here, although they might have lent more visual interest to a presentation that heavily relies on talking heads and archival footage. Still, given Márquez's superstar status in world literature, this made-for-libraries biographical portrait of the author is recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Jaco ★★★½

(2015) 2 discs. 217 min. DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99. MVD Entertainment Group (avail. from most distributors).

Directors Paul Marchand and Stephan Kijak join forces for this stirring portrait of renowned bassist Jaco Pastorius (1951-1987), who grew up in Florida surrounded by music since his father, Jack, was a nightclub singer. Jaco played the drums before turning to the bass, which proved a perfect fit. Soul singer Wayne Cochran praises Jaco's ability to play anything thrown at him. Jaco's brother, Gregory, recalls that the birth of Jaco's daughter, Mary, inspired him to aim higher than session work. Sting believes that Jaco transformed bass playing into something symphonic, while Herbie Hancock marvels at Jaco's ability to invest his playing with personality. Mary says that her father heard music in everything, concluding, "It's a gift and it's a burden." A chance meeting with Bobby Colomby of Blood, Sweat, & Tears led to a deal with Epic and Jaco's first solo album in 1976. Jaco could have continued down the solo path, but instead he joined Weather Report, which helped to unite rock and jazz fans, inspiring bassists such as Flea and Metallica's Robert Trujillo (the latter produced this documentary). Cocky and competitive, Jaco enjoyed a fractious relationship with Weather Report founder Joe Zawinul, but Joni Mitchell and other collaborators noticed that his behavior was becoming downright erratic in the late 1970s as mental illness and substance abuse issues surfaced. There were other problems, as well, which makes *Jaco* increasingly hard to watch, but Marchand and Kijak avoid melodrama for a more matter-of-fact approach. Juan Alderete of the Mars Volta speaks for many bassists when he states: "He was our Hendrix." Extras include bonus interviews. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

BaddDDD Sonia Sanchez ★★★

(2015) 91 min. DVD: \$24.95; individuals; \$49.95; public libraries & high schools; \$295; colleges & universities. California Newsreel. PPR. Closed captioned.

Co-directed by Barbara Attie, Janet Goldwater, and Sabrina Schmidt Gordon, this feature-length documentary celebrates the life of octogenarian African-American poet and activist Sonia Sanchez, presenting autobiographical reflections by Sanchez, reading of her work by herself and others (including actress Ruby Dee), and testimony about her influence from colleagues and scholars. Alabama-born Sanchez speaks movingly of her youth: she lost her mother as an infant and had a troubled childhood involving a frequently-absent father and neglectful relatives. She also describes the incident that energized her at the age of 19, when she was summarily turned down for a writing job in New York because of her color. That discriminatory experience inspired Sanchez to participate in the creation of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, and to become a pioneer in the establishment of Black Studies curricula in American colleges (her early efforts in San Francisco met resistance, but were ultimately recognized when Sanchez was appointed to a professorship at Temple University in 1977). Sanchez's brief involvement with the Nation of Islam and her verbal confrontation with the Black Panthers, as well as her role in the anti-war movement of the '70s, are also touched upon. Often accompanied by jazz musicians here, Sanchez's recitations of free-verse poetry are now seen as a precursor of hip-hop and rap. Offering an illuminating and inspiring profile of an influential figure who helped to bring about significant social change, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



ALA-VRT Notable Videos 2016

The American Library Association (ALA) Video Round Table Notable Videos for Adults Committee has compiled its 2016 list of Notable Videos for Adults, a list of 15 outstanding films released on video within the past two years. Unless otherwise noted, titles are available from most distributors or the companies are listed in the "Distributor Addresses" on page 82.

Alive Inside (City Drive Films, 78 min., DVD or Blu-ray: \$19.95). Filmmaker Michael Rossato-Bennett's documentary celebrating the salutary impact of music on dementia patients centers on social worker Dan Cohen, who provides iPods to nursing home residents suffering from Alzheimer's and other forms of mental debilitation. (VL-1/15)

Call Me Lucky (MPI, 105 min., DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98). Standup comic turned filmmaker Bobcat Goldthwait pays tribute to Barry Crimmins, acerbic critic of the conservative Reagan-Bush years, mentor to comics, and champion of victims of Internet child abuse. (VL-1/16)

E-Team (Ro*co Films Educational [www.rocoeducational.com], 89 min., DVD: \$95; high schools & public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities). Filmmakers Katy Cheigny and Ross Kauffman's documentary spotlights members of an Emergencies Team international human rights group who investigate trouble spots around the globe. (See upcoming review in VL-5/16).

Freedom Summer (PBS, 120 min. DVD: \$24.99 [\$54.99 w/PPR from www.teacher.shop.pbs.org]). Acclaimed documentary filmmaker Stanley Nelson brilliantly captures the passion, anguish, and fury of Mississippi's 1964 summer months during the volatile Civil Rights era in this PBS-aired film. (VL-11/14)

God Loves Uganda (First Run, 83 min.

DVD: \$24.95). Exploring how the African nation of Uganda became a hotbed for hatred aimed at gays and lesbians in the last decade, Oscar-winning director Roger Ross Williams's powerful documentary finds that part of the blame lies with American evangelical churches. (VL-7/14)

The Great Invisible (Anchor Bay, 92 min., DVD: \$19.98 [\$95: high schools & public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities from Ro*co Films Educational, www.rocoeducational.com]). Director Margaret Brown travels across Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas, exploring the legacy of the April 2010 Deepwater Horizon explosion. (See upcoming review in VL-5/16).

India's Daughter (Women Make Movies, 62 min., in Hindi w/English subtitles, DVD: \$89; high schools & public libraries; \$395: colleges & universities). Filmmaker Leslee Udwin's documentary tells the tragic story of the brutal 2012 gang rape on a Delhi bus of a 23-year-old medical student, who later died from her injuries. (See upcoming review in VL-5/16).

The Kill Team (Bullfrog Films, 79 min., DVD: \$350). Director Dan Krauss's cinematic inquest examines crimes committed on the American side of the war in Afghanistan, here told mostly from the point of view of infantryman Adam Winfield while preparing for his trial. (VL-7/15)

The Missing Picture (Strand, 92 min., DVD: \$27.99). Cambodian director Rithy Panh's iconoclastic Oscar-nominated documentary tells the story of his family's harrowing experiences during the Khmer Rouge terror of the 1970s, using meticulously carved wooden and clay figures arranged in various situations. (VL-5/14)

The Punk Singer (MPI, 81 min., DVD: \$24.98). Filmmaker Sini Anderson's documentary focuses on the life story of musician and Lyme disease sufferer Kathleen Hanna, covering Hanna's years in Bikini Kill, Le

Tigre, and her current band, the Julie Ruin. (VL-5/14)

The Salt of the Earth (Sony, 110 min., Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$26.99). Filmmaker Wim Wenders and Juliano Ribeiro Salgado's documentary explores the work of the latter's father, humanistic photographer Sebastião Salgado. (VL-7/15)

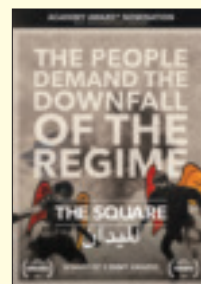
The Square (City Drive Films, 109 min., DVD or Blu-ray: \$17.98). Director Jehane Noujaim's 2013 Oscar nominee for Best Documentary captures real-time events in Cairo's Tahrir Square, a symbolic stronghold for dissenters protesting against the repressive Mubarak government in 2011. (VL-1/16)

Watchers of the Sky (Music Box Films, 121 min., DVD: \$29.95). Edet Belzberg's documentary tells the story of Raphael Lemkin, a refugee from Nazi-occupied Poland who coined the term "genocide" and lost nearly 50 family members to the Holocaust. (VL-5/15)

Web (Sundial Pictures [http://sundial-pictures.com], 84 min., DVD: \$24.95 [\$200 w/PPR]). Filmmaker Michael Kleiman's documentary chronicles a project to introduce laptop computers and Internet connectivity to children in remote Peruvian locales. (VL-3/15)

The Whole Gritty City (Alexander Street Press [www.alexanderstreet.com], 89 min., DVD: \$295). Three Louisiana marching bands prepare for Mardi Gras in this documentary from filmmakers Richard Barber and Andre Lambertson. (VL-5/15)

The Notable Videos for Adults Committee members are: Chair, Wendy Highby, University Libraries, University of Northern Colorado; Cecilia Cygnar, Niles Public Library District, IL; Linda Frederiksen, Washington State University, Vancouver Library; Maura Lynch, Guilderland Public Library, Albany, NY; Sandra Macke, Catalog Librarian, Portland, OR; Jeffrey Pearson, Askwith Media Library, University of Michigan Ann Arbor; Junior Tidal, Ursula C. Schwerin Library, New York City College of Technology, CUNY; and Lorraine Wochna, Alden Library, Ohio University.



Kurt Cobain: Montage of Heck ★★★

(2015) 132 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$24.98.
Universal Music Enterprises (avail. from most distributors).

While other filmmakers have made documentaries about Nirvana singer-songwriter Kurt Cobain (1967-1994), Brett Morgen's *Montage of Heck* is likely to prove definitive, especially since Morgen had unfettered access to family members and archival material. Serving up a chronological biography, the film interweaves home movies with insightful interviews. Some speakers, like Cobain's mother, Wendy O'Connor, have never talked about him on camera before, but agreed to participate after Kurt's daughter, Frances Bean Cobain, signed on as producer. So it's somewhat surprising that the documentary paints a fairly critical portrait. O'Connor praises her son's musical talent as a child, but says that after her divorce from Don Cobain, Kurt never recovered from his feelings of betrayal (this thematic thread runs throughout, making Kurt seem more emotionally stunted than sensitive and sympathetic). Morgen draws on journal entries, drawings, and audiotapes to track the stages of Cobain's development, skillfully editing the material together (although the animated segments, which depict Kurt in private moments, seem extraneous). Since the director opted to focus on Cobain's point of view, he keeps interviews to a minimum, but does include key figures such as Nirvana bass player Krist Novoselic, and Cobain's widow, Courtney Love. Morgen appears to have little interest in rehashing the details of Cobain's suicide—one of the music world's more tragic losses—but otherwise does a fine job of telling Cobain's story. Extras include bonus interviews and a photo gallery. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Sinatra: All or Nothing at All ★★★1/2

(2015) 2 discs. 259 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$29.98.
Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

Oscar-winning director Alex Gibney's HBO-aired profile of singing legend Frank Sinatra uses Ol' Blue Eyes' 1971 retirement concert as a structuring device, with the 11 songs he performed serving as a kind of autobiography. Gibney combines new and archival interviews with footage from Sinatra's life, while his kids—Nancy, Frank, and Tina—provide much of the voiceover, along with collaborators, such as composer Nelson Riddle. Gibney also incorporates several interviews with Sinatra himself, including a revealing conversation with Walter Cronkite from the 1960s. Sinatra grew up in Hoboken, NJ, during the Depression. When he proved more successful at singing than studying, Sinatra dropped out of school, and his fame grew as he worked with Harry James and Tommy Dorsey. Once Hollywood beckoned, Sinatra moved to California, where he embarked on

a film career and a series of affairs—after meeting Ava Gardner, his first marriage was over (Gina Gershon provides Gardner's perspective from her writings). Gibney then moves to Sinatra's Oscar-winning turn in *From Here to Eternity*, his campaigning on behalf of John F. Kennedy, and his marriage to Mia Farrow, which ended just as his work was starting to seem passé. Along the way, the film examines his Mafia ties and his exploits with the Rat Pack in Las Vegas. Although he intended to retire in 1971, Sinatra would revive his music career a few years later, and Gibney closes with a 1978 rendition of "New York, New York." It's a positive note on which to end an evenhanded portrait of a life with as many lows as highs. Extras include bonus audio interviews. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Turned Towards the Sun ★★★

(2014) 91 min. DVD: \$19.95. MVD Entertainment Group (avail. from most distributors).

Michael "Micky" Burn (1912-2010) was an Englishman whose life often played like a wild thriller. His father was employed by the House of Windsor and as a young man Burn was briefly enchanted by the early economic promise of Nazism in rebuilding the German economy (he even had an audience with Hitler). But Burn quickly became disillusioned with the Third Reich and served in the Royal Army in World War II, participating in the commando raid on St. Nazaire. Captured and held in a POW camp, Burn later won the Military Cross for his valor. Burn would go on to embrace Marxism and enjoy a successful writing career. Greg Olliver's documentary plays up Burn's links to many prominent individuals—some on an intimate basis (a bisexual, Burn was once the lover of future Soviet spy Guy Burgess) and some that are rather tenuous (Burn's claim to have rescued Audrey Hepburn during wartime was based on his sending food and cigarettes to the future star's mother, who sold them on the black market in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands). Burn found new audiences as a journalist while covering the frontlines of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, and in his final years was a beloved raconteur. Offering a glowing tribute to a man whose life was fascinating, fast-paced, and full of adventure, this biographical profile is recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) for more reviews during March and April, including: *Chasing Pluto*, *Defining Sexual Assault*, *Demon on Wheels*, *The Image Revolution*, *Sweet Georgia Brown*, *The True Cost*, 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.

Lidia Celebrates America: Home for the Holidays (60 min., DVD: \$24.99)

is the most recent special from WGBH and PBS Distribution's public television-aired series featuring culinary expert Lidia Bastianich, who here looks at a variety of holiday traditions. See review of *Lidia Celebrates America: Life's Milestones* in VL-5/14.



Shout! Factory has released the newest addition to their animated animal series, *Pound Puppies: A Rare Pair* (110 min., DVD: \$12.99), which follows the pups of Shelter 17 and the Kennel Kittens as they work together to help pets find the best home. See review of *Pound Puppies—Mission: Adoption* in VL-7/13.

Paramount Home Entertainment's latest release in their Nickelodeon-aired computer-animated series about monster trucks is *Blaze and the Monster Machines: Rev Up and Roar* (87 min., DVD: \$14.99), which includes four episodes featuring dinosaur and monster truck pals. See review of *Blaze of Glory: A Mini-Movie* in VL-5/15.

The Family Films Collection (120 min., DVD: \$14.99), the latest Vision Video release of Gospel Films Archive's collection of vintage short films featuring Christian themes, includes *This My Son* (1954), *Missionary to Walker's Garage* (1961), *Rim of the Wheel* (1951), and *Honor Thy Family* (1951). See review of *The Christopher Films Collection* in VL-9/15.

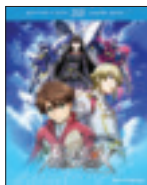
NCircle Entertainment's Guess How Much I Love You: The Song of Spring (80 min., DVD: \$9.99)

is the latest animated compilation featuring the Nutbrown hare family and their meadow and forest pals, based on the children's books by author Sam McBratney and illustrator Anita Jeram. See review of *Guess How Much I Love You: Hidden Treasure* in VL-1/14.



Buddy Complex: The Complete Series ★★★

(2014) 5 discs. 375 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$54.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



A time-travel gimmick distinguishes this intricately detailed combat/sci-fi saga. Aoba Watase is a typical high-schooler circa 2014, who is faced with a huge “mecha” robot that appears out of nowhere, trying to kill him. Aoba is saved by the surprise intervention of classmate Hina, who is suddenly piloting a mecha herself. Thrust by Hina into a “singularity” time warp, Aoba finds himself in the year 2088, during a World War between the Confederation (Japan and Asia-Pacific nations) and Zogilia (obviously Russia), with the standard weapon being the “Valiancer”—which consists of giant powered armor (piloted by teenagers, naturally). Although initially regarded with suspicion by the Confederation, Aoba soon proves himself an ace Valiancer operator. But then he re-encounters Hina—a fierce Valiancer pilot for Zogilia, with no memory of their previous life together. Their time-tangled relationship plays out during a broad-canvas saga of battlefield camaraderie, betrayal, intrigue, service-drama hijinks, and doomsday weapons. Compiling all 13 episodes from 2014 in a Japanese-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include two bonus OVAs, and promo videos. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Daimidaler: Prince vs. Penguin Empire: The Complete Series ★

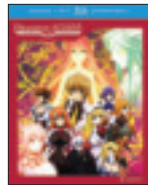
(2014) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



One of the worst anime productions to ever come down the proverbial pike, *Daimidaler* takes all of the stereotypical vices of anime—misogyny, incoherent storylines, pointless violence—and magnifies them a thousand-fold, with nary a jot of anything resembling wit or style. The plot revolves around a teenage pervert named Kouichi who has the ability to produce the Hi-ERO particles needed to operate a giant robot. But Kouichi can only create these particles by molesting buxom girls, which he does in disgustingly graphic detail. The reason Kouichi and his robot are needed is because Earth is facing an invasion of alien penguins with huge front tails (that look suspiciously phallic). Unfortunately, the makers of this enervated mess are unable to differentiate between comedy and vulgarity. Compiling all 12 episodes from 2014 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-MA, extras include audio commentaries and bonus OVAs. Not recommended. (P. Hall)

Dragonar Academy: Complete Series ★★

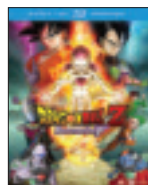
(2014) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



This humdrum manga-derived T&A fantasy will appeal to those who felt that Anne McCaffrey’s *Pern* novels unfairly omitted the key elements of huge cleavage, butts bulging out of panties, and human-dragon sexual entendres. In a realm where humans and intelligent dragons co-exist, the Dragonar Academy hosts would-be dragon masters learning to partner with their scaly companions. Problem-student Ash Blake—destined to be a great dragon-master in spite of himself—is the reluctant recipient of an immature dragon who happens to take the human form of a nubile, flame-haired girl. Ash names her Eco, although she insists that she is the master in their relationship, which basically revolves around saving each other from peril and being found in ribald situations (since she’s a dragon, Eco often goes clothing-optional). There is a threat here from villains controlling undead/corrupted dragons that flagrantly molest women using tentacles—but fortunately a counterforce of busty princesses are always up for strategy-planning sessions (sometimes nude in the communal bath). Compiling all 12 episodes from 2014 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-MA, extras include audio commentaries and promo videos. Not a necessary purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Dragonball Z: Resurrection 'F' ★★★

(2015) 95 min. DVD: \$29.98; Blu-ray/DVD Combo: 2 discs, \$34.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Fox joined with legendary Japanese studio Toei to release this 2015 latest theatrical spin-off in the long-running *Dragonball Z* franchise of fight-saturated adventure-fantasies starring Goku, a “Saiyan” alien martial-artist who came to Earth as part of a fearsome conquering warrior race. But Goku is a good-natured lug whose only ambition is to boost his fighting abilities higher and higher, so he has turned out to be the planet’s defender, accessorized with a nagging wife, a son, and sequels-full of extended family, allies, and other talking-animal and shape-shifting-ninja types. Directed by Tadayoshi Yamamuro, the film’s plot concerns one of the franchise’s longstanding villains, evil galactic conqueror Frieza, last seen to be literally in little pieces. Thanks to the mystic power of the “Dragon Balls,” Frieza is brought back to life with boosted powers and he is determined to come to Earth to destroy Goku and his friends in a rematch. Fans won’t be disappointed, although newbies to the *Dragonball* mythology will likely

be baffled. Presented in a dual-language edition, rated TV-PG, extras (on the Blu-ray/DVD Combo version) include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Momokyun Sword: Complete Collection

★1/2

(2014) 300 min. DVD: 2 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: \$59.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors).



One of the best-known Japanese fairy-tales is that of “Peach Boy,” a heroic lad found by an old couple inside of a peach, who grows up to be a conqueror of demons. This cheesecake variation envisions a Peach Girl, named Momoko, who matures with enormous, pendulous breasts. Because of Momoko’s ability to bond with her retinue of animal-spirit friends (a monkey, a pheasant, and dog) for superior fighting prowess, Momoko is recruited to assist the huge-chested “Celestial Maiden Squad” in battle against power-hungry demons. Some demons turn out to be not as bad as they seem, and there are some nice riffs here on Nippon folklore and established characters of legend (the Maidens become feudal singing idols, unintentionally turning all of the ferocious samurai into simpering sissy sycophants). But for the most part, this is clichéd formula fare mixing boobs, butts, and battles. Compiling all 12 episodes from 2014 in separate DVD and Blu-ray editions, rated TV-14, and presented in Japanese with English subtitles, this is not recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Riddle Story of Devil: The Complete Series ★★1/2

(2014) 2 discs. 325 min. DVD: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Ever-optimistic Haru Ichinose just wants to graduate from her prestigious Class Black at the Myōjō Academy private boarding school, but her 12 classmates are actually assassins who were sent to kill her—and whoever succeeds will receive her fondest wish. Assassin Tokaku Azuma, for reasons mysterious even to herself, casts herself as Ichinose’s protector from the other highly-motivated girls. Is this a case of altruism, love, or something else? Adapted from the ongoing manga *Akuma no Ridōru* by Yun Kōga, this is a yuri (girl love) actioner with emotional overtones. Each assassin receives a background story explaining her personal path to Class Black and ambitions, some of which are poignant while others are malevolent. But while the animation sparkles, the series doesn’t really do justice to the stories of the assassins, and the hints of romance remain frustratingly just that. Presenting all 13 episodes from 2014 in a dual-language edition, rated TV-14, extras include episode commentaries. Optional. (L. Martincik)

Adam's Passion ★★★

(2015) 94 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Accentus Music (avail. from most distributors).



The music of Estonian composer Arvo Pärt has a hushed, ethereal beauty, but is also static and repetitive—an unlikely choice for conventional ballet treatment. But in this 2015 world premiere performance at the Noblessner Foundry Tallinn, avant-garde American stage director (and sometime choreographer) Robert Wilson finds an appropriate visual complement to the music's contemplative quality, employing statuesque poses and movements that are sometimes barely perceptible. Their collaborative work brings together four separate pieces by Pärt. A gentle orchestral *Sequentia*, newly composed, leads into *Adam's Lament* (2009), a choral setting of a poem by a monk of Mount Athos in which the first man foresees all the pain his sin will cause humanity. Following *Tabula rasa* (1977), a double concerto for two violins and piano, the chorus returns for *Miserere* (1989/92), a plea for divine mercy. Wilson accompanies the music with a long sequence of the naked Adam, slowly turning and then walking down a ramp extended into the audience, followed by another in which adults and children, watched by a heavily costumed woman, carry ladders in patterns while a boy balances what appears to be a brick on his head. The performers' movements on the nearly bare stage are agonizingly slow, set off by Wilson's imaginative lighting design. Conductor Tõnu Kaljuste elicits refined work from the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra and the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Aida ★★★1/2

(2015) 151 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. C Major/Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



You would expect Milan's La Scala to serve up Verdi's ever-popular opera with exuberance and confidence, and that is certainly the case in Peter Stein's 2015 staging, which brilliantly blends tradition with innovation, displaying sumptuous costumes (some in period style while others sport modernist touches) set against backgrounds that emphasize geometric shapes rather than quasi-realistic structures. While the look is striking, the real glory of this *Aida* lies on the musical side. Conductor Zubin Mehta delivers powerful orchestral accompaniment to an exceptional cast. Kristin Lewis acts touchingly and sings ravishingly in the title role of the Ethiopian princess in Egyptian captivity, while Fabio

Sartori, although beefy in appearance, exhibits a huge, ringing tenor as Radamès, the general whose love for Aida leads to their joint doom. But both are very nearly overshadowed by Anita Rachvelishvili, who brings fire as well as luscious tone to the role of Amneris, the rival whose jealousy destroys the lovers. The supporting cast can't match this power trio—in the role of high priest Ramfis, Matti Salminen's once rock-steady bass shows a newfound gruffness—but overall this *Aida* brings welcome freshness to an operatic warhorse that too often suffers from pedestrian run-throughs. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and PCM stereo, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Black Stone Cherry—Thank You: Livin' Live, Birmingham, UK ★★★1/2

(2014) 131 min. DVD: \$20.98 (audio CD included), Blu-ray: \$25.98 (audio CD included). Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



For their first Birmingham concert, Kentucky alternative-metal outfit Black Stone Cherry played at Barfly—a venue that holds 200 people. For this 2014 engagement, on tour for their album *Magic Mountain*, the band appear at the LG Arena (since renamed Genting Arena), which holds over 15,000. After releasing four full-length albums, it's not surprising they would make a few British fans. But their sound couldn't be more quintessentially American. Even when covering U.K. trio Cream's "Sunshine of Your Love," they still sound as if they grew up on Southern rock acts—such as Lynyrd Skynyrd and Molly Hatchet—an effect reinforced by their plaid shirts, jeans, and tattoos. But apparently that's a big part of their appeal, since 2011's *Between the Devil & the Deep Blue Sea* was a top five hit in Britain, but barely cracked the Top 40 in the U.S. This 21-song set consists of shouted rockers that inspire singing and fist-pumping from the crowd, particularly on "Such a Shame," which features more vocals from the audience than lead singer-guitarist Chris Robertson, who stays rooted to the spot, while guitarist Ben Wells and bassist Jon Lawhon never stop moving back and forth across the stage, and drummer John Fred Young takes a loose-limbed, John Bonham approach to his kit. Extras include a bonus audio CD, and an interview with Robertson and Wells from 2015's Download Festival along with two songs from their headlining performance. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

Cinderella ★★★

(2013) 110 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$42.99. Mariinsky (dist. by Naxos of America).

Serge Prokofiev's 1944 fairy-tale ballet

has never achieved the international renown of his earlier *Romeo and Juliet*, but this scintillating 2013 staging from St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre certainly makes a strong impression.



A revival of the 2002 production by Alexei Ratmansk, *Cinderella* is presented on an oddly spare stage—with only a couple of staircases and a few sticks of furniture—but the costumes are vibrantly colorful and the choreography displays an exuberant mixture of soulful elegance and almost frantic gestures. The company orchestra plays the alternately spiky and lush score brilliantly for musical director Valery Gergiev, while the dancing is splendid. Diana Vishneva makes for a lovely heroine, her hesitant gestures perfectly capturing the character's shyness, and she's admirably partnered with Vladimir Shklyarov, who brings both hauteur and boyishness to the prince, reaching a high level of virtuosity in his long third-act search for the girl whose foot will fit the glass slipper. The rest of the cast shine as well, with Ekaterina Kondaurova—wearing a bright orange wig—threatening to steal the show as the wicked stepmother. While *Romeo and Juliet* is undoubtedly the composer's greatest ballet, Ratmansk's inventive take on *Cinderella* justifies its continuing place in the Russian repertory. Presented in PCM stereo, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

The Color of Noise ★★★

(2015) 120 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$19.95. MVD Entertainment Group (avail. from most distributors).



Eric Robel's digressive documentary revolves around Tom Hazelymyer, musician and founder of Amphetamine Reptile Records. As a framing device, Robel draws on a 25th anniversary concert that took place in Minneapolis in 2010. Hazelymyer makes for a unique subject, since he's a private man with a public profile—even though he provided an interview, most of the commentary here comes from the bands he worked with, including Cows and the Melvins. *The Color of Noise* moves along chronologically, starting with Halo of Flies, the noise-rock trio in which Hazelymyer began to make his reputation. While the band was getting off the ground, he joined the Marines, partly because he didn't have the grades for college, but Robel also hints at a conservatism that is somewhat at odds with the indie-rock scene: Hazelymyer is a gun enthusiast with an antipathy for hippies (Robel could have explored this subject more, particularly in light of Hazelymyer's use of stylized swastikas). While Hazelymyer was on leave, the band played and recorded, but couldn't interest a label, so Hazelymyer started his own. From

1986 to 1998, he signed over 70 acts, some of whom—like Helmet—would eventually move on to major labels. He also worked with artists, like Coop and Frank Koziak, who designed album covers and posters. Their influence on Hazelmeyer was so profound that he segued from music to art. His new career began in earnest after a bout with spinal meningitis in 2009. Afterward, he found printmaking therapeutic, and has since opened an art gallery. Both visually and aurally stimulating, *The Color of Noise* offers an engaging mix of “color” and “noise” capturing Hazelmeyer’s B-movie aesthetic. Presented in 5.1 surround sound and stereo, extras include an audio commentary, behind-the-scenes featurettes, a 1992 interview with Hazelmeyer, bonus song performances, a poster gallery, and a booklet. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Der Freischütz ★★½

(2015) 149 min. In German w/English subtitles, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. C Major/Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



Carl Maria von Weber’s 1821 masterwork—a milestone in the development of German Romantic opera—tells a supernatural tale that focuses on Max, a huntsman who is so anxious to win the hand of Agathe in a shooting contest that he is persuaded by Kaspar, a man who has sold his soul to the devil, to do the same in return for seven magic bullets that will always find their targets. It would be difficult to imagine a more potent presentation of *Der Freischütz*—which boasts a succession of memorable arias and choruses—than this 2015 production from the Dresden Semperoper. Christian Thielemann coaxes extraordinary playing from the Staatskapelle Dresden, while the vocalism is top-notch, with Michael König (Max), Sara Jakubiak (Agathe) and Georg Zeppenfeld (Kaspar) all superb, and Christina Landshamer adding a touch of joviality as Agathe’s good-natured cousin Ännchen. Some may object to director Axel Köhler’s updating of the action from the 17th century to what appears to be post-WWII, but he certainly creates a striking tableau for the key setting of Wolf’s Glen, which features corpses hanging in the air, bathed in hellish red lighting. In all, this is a thoroughly gripping version of Weber’s opera, even though the visuals are sometimes a bit too dark (a deliberate effect of the lighting design). Presented in DTS 5.0 (DTS-HD 5.0 on the Blu-ray release) and PCM stereo, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Die Fledermaus ★★½

(1990) 197 min. DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99; Blu-ray: \$24.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).

The big selling point of this December 31, 1990 performance—mounted at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden—of

Johann Strauss II’s most famous operetta (a complicated farce of infidelity and mistaken identities) is that it celebrated the career of Dame Joan Sutherland, who was retiring from the stage. Although Sutherland was not part of the regular cast, she and her colleagues Marilyn Horne and Luciano Pavarotti appeared in the traditional “gala scene” at Prince Orlofsky’s ball in Act 2, singing pieces by Cilea, Rossini, Saint-Saëns, and Verdi before Sutherland offered “Home Sweet Home” to expected cheers (also featured is a ballet interlude). Otherwise this staging, presented in an English translation that invites much mugging from the cast, is a rather broad affair, made all the more peculiar in that the Orlofsky role is taken by countertenor Jochen Kowalksi rather than the traditional mezzo—although Sutherland’s husband Richard Bonyng’s conducting does bring a solid lilt to the familiar tunes. Viewers also must suffer a prolonged comic riff at the beginning of Act 3 by John Sessions as the jailer, which recalls the music hall as much as the operatic stage, and notes the presence of John Major, the newly-installed Prime Minister, in one of the venue’s boxes. Made for British TV, this *Die Fledermaus* (*The Bat*) exhibits the visual and sonic limitations one would expect of a quarter-century-plus-old TV production, but even though it will appeal more to aficionados of Sutherland than Strauss, it is a fine tribute to one of the 20th century’s greatest coloratura sopranos. Presented in PCM stereo, extras include bonus segments of Sutherland singing famous arias by Verdi, Donizetti, and Bellini excerpted from filmed Opera Australia productions. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



Giving Up the Ghosts: Closing Time at Doc’s Music Hall ★★½

(2014) 80 min. Blu-ray: \$19.95. MVD Entertainment Group (avail. from most distributors).



Respected music documentary filmmaker Robert Mugge’s latest captures the last night at an influential music venue: Doc’s Music Hall, which was originally a Muncie, IN, shoe store bought and reinvented in 1992 by keyboard player John Peterson, who oversaw the place for 20 years. In opening remarks, Peterson notes, “Yes, I’m a real doctor.” He keeps his board certification in Western medicine up to date, while incorporating Eastern systems such as Ayurvedic medicine into his practice. He opened Doc’s in order to revive the style of venues he played in as a musician during the 1960s. In between full-length song performances here, Peterson and his associates—including manager Mike Martin—recount the place’s history. Associate Paul Troxel mentions ghosts that some

observers claimed to have seen over the years, suggesting that they might be vaudevillians of yore looking for somewhere to hang out since the building did attract artistic types in the early-20th century. The musical portion of the program includes a 10-song set with the house band, featuring guitarist Douglas Hunt, saxophone player Phil Dunn, and drummer Kyle Ivy, who concentrate on rock and R&B covers such as the Doors’ “Light My Fire” and Lionel Richie’s “All Night Long.” Everyone except Hunt sings, but they are better musicians than singers, so the instrumental selections work best, like Peterson’s “Tribute to Monk.” While too narrowly focused to have wide appeal, this should still be considered a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

The Jam: About the Young Idea ★★½

(2014) 2 discs. 90 min. DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$24.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



In the late ‘70s, the working-class British punk trio The Jam had a somewhat different look and sound compared to contemporary acts like the Sex Pistols, drawing on R&B influences and sporting a ‘60s mod fashion style instead of safety pins and torn clothing. The band’s debut LP, 1977’s *In the City*, featured driving songs written by singer-guitarist Paul Weller, backed by bassist Bruce Foxton, and drummer Rick Buckler—including the titular youth anthem single that promised “we wanna say, we gonna tell ya/about the young idea.” Although only six years old when The Jam arrived on the music scene, Martin Freeman (*Sherlock*, *The Hobbit*) became a lifelong fan (“I know every lick of those records.”) Freeman is one of several aficionados singing the band’s praises in Bob Smeaton’s documentary profile, which presents a relatively anodyne and controversy-free chronological portrait tracing the rise and rise of the group (in Britain, that is; The Jam’s political songs never caught fire in America) up through the release of their sixth and final LP, 1982’s *The Gift*. Shortly thereafter, Weller—at the ripe old age of 23—walked away from it all (forming the Style Council two years later, and continuing to have a critically-acclaimed solo career to this day). Weller, Foxton, and Buckler are all on hand to visit key locations in the band’s history while also offering reminiscences—although never onscreen together. In fact, “The Bitterest Pill”—the title of a late single—of their breakup is essentially glossed over here (Foxton reputedly did not speak to Weller for 25 years, but he did appear on a 2010 Weller solo album). While the love and enthusiasm for the group is wonderful to hear (full disclosure: The Jam rank as one of my all-time favorite bands), the narrative here is ultimately a bit thin—no redemptive

tales, no tear-filled reunions, not even sex and drugs to go along with the rock 'n' roll, just a well-deserved appreciation of a landmark band that many have never listened to. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include additional interviews and performances, as well as a bonus DVD of The Jam performing a 22-song set on the German TV show *Rockpalast* (with audio options in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo). Although sometimes overdriven, the DTS 5.1 concert sound is pretty good and the band is at their energetic best on classic tunes such as "Going Underground," "The Eton Rifles," and the haunting "Down in the Tube Station at Midnight." A strong optional purchase. (R. Pitman)

Just Let Go: Lenny Kravitz Live ★★½

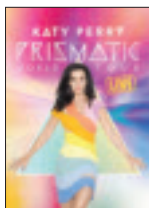
(2014) 166 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



This 2014 European tour documentary draws from several shows, interweaving song performances with interview clips. Although Lenny Kravitz plays most instruments when recording albums, he's backed onstage by 11 musicians, including guitarist Craig Ross, keyboard player George Laks, bass player Gail Ann Dorsey, and drummer Cindy Blackman Santana. Ross met Kravitz through Kathy Valentine of the Go-Go's, who introduced the two when Kravitz was recording under the name Romeo Blue, and they've been together ever since. While the others haven't been with Kravitz as long, the band's versatility helps make up for the generic quality of the performer's newer material, such as "Dirty White Boots" ("We're gonna get it on in your dirty white boots") off 2014's *Strut*, which isn't as distinctive as the songs that brought him to fame in the 1990s, like "Always on the Run," "Fly Away," and "Are You Gonna Go My Way?" (all played here). In terms of musicianship, however, Kravitz and his band skillfully integrate rock with funk and soul, and director Paul Dugdale incorporates interviews with each musician, as well as rehearsal footage. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

Katy Perry: Prismatic World Tour Live ★★

(2014) 147 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

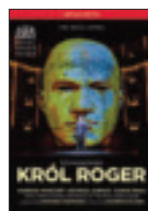


Katy Perry's Prismatic World Tour began in 2014,

a year after the release of her multi-platinum *Prism*. Capturing a December performance in Sydney, Australia, this concert features nine costumes and seven set changes—everything a Perry fan could want. But aside from the acoustic segment, Perry spends so much time jumping, dancing, and flying through the air that live vocals here seem unlikely, since they would be wobbly at best. The staging makes little attempt to disguise the subterfuge, with dancers often taking the place of her band, which means that some of their parts were probably pre-recorded as well. Regardless, the spectacle's the thing, and on that basis, Perry delivers the goods, singing the hits, like "California Gurls," and never forgetting that her audience consists primarily of young girls (as shots of the crowd prove). She even brings two members up on stage, a swimsuit-clad teenager with whom she takes a selfie and an 8-year-old to whom she gives a box of pizza, which probably contains more tour merchandise than food. If Perry's dance-pop sound doesn't deviate much from song to song, it certainly provides a hospitable canvas for the visuals, which range from the lighted prism that brings her to the stage, to a short film featuring cat cut-outs, to the animatronic horse she rides during the show's Egyptian portion. Even her guitarists join her for a trip through the air during which their fret-boards spray sparks above the crowd. All told, it's pretty fun stuff for those who value stagecraft over musical innovation. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include behind-the-scenes footage. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Król Roger ★★½

(2015) 88 min. In Polish w/ English subtitles. DVD or Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

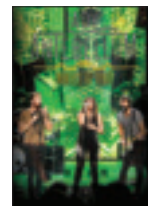


It has taken a long while for Karol Szymanowski's 1926 opera to win international recognition, but this excellent production of *Król Roger* at London's Royal Opera House suggests that the time has finally come. The libretto—serving up a parable of the struggle between emotion and intellect inspired by Euripides's *The Bacchae*—is set in the 12th century and centers on a handsome young Shepherd accused of heresy at the court of King Roger of Sicily for espousing what amounts to hedonistic beliefs. The Shepherd's words arouse Queen Roxana, who goes off with him, after which Roger follows the pair to the East, where the Shepherd is revealed as the god Dionysius, whose bacchant followers Roxana has joined. Szymanowski clothes this strange tale with music that is extraordinary for its surging rhythms and voluptuous scoring, played to the hilt by the house orchestra under the baton of Antonio Pappano. The vocalism and acting of Mariusz

Kwiecień (Roger), Georgia Jarman (Queen Roxana), and Saimir Pirgu (the Shepherd) are also utterly committed. This 2015 production is equally remarkable for Kasper Holten's staging, which is dominated by the statue of a gigantic human head (designed by Steffen Aarfing), which rotates in Act 2 to reveal three levels—an observatory, a library, and a room with a group of writhing dancers—that correspond to Freud's superego, ego, and id. The costumes suggest an eclectic mix of styles and periods, with the Shepherd's garb standing out in its bright, shimmering colors. Presented in DTS 5.1 and Dolby Digital stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include audio commentary by Holten and Pappano, an introduction to the opera, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and a cast gallery. A worthy competitor to the 2009 Bregenz Festival production (VL-1/11), this mounting of an intriguing, provocative modern opera is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Lady Antebellum: Wheels Up Tour ★★

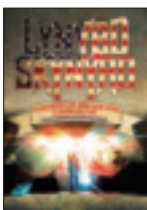
(2015) 101 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Nashville country-pop trio Lady Antebellum (Dave Haywood, Charles Kelley, and Hillary Scott) put on a fan-friendly show in this 2015 engagement from the Meadows Amphitheatre in Irvine, CA. On tour in support of their sixth album, *747*, the band serves up a polished 20-song set (including a medley) that spans their career and influences. Between selections, behind-the-scenes material provides a glimpse of stage planning, meet-and-greets, and other offstage activities. Early in the show, Haywood introduces their backing band: Jonathan Long (keyboards), Dennis Edwards (bass), Clint Chandler (guitar, banjo, mandolin), Jason "Slim" Gambill (guitar), and Scott's husband, Chris Tyrell (drums). Midway through the proceedings, Nashville singer and mandolin player Hunter Hayes—their tour mate—joins the group for three songs, including the collaborative effort "Where It All Begins," and "Compass," which Hayes performs solo. Aside from the hits, such as the recent "Bartender," the band plays songs from Shania Twain and Fleetwood Mac, giving them a chance to stretch the borders of their mid-tempo sound, particularly on Aerosmith's hard-rocking "Walk This Way." All the while, the irrepressible Haywood mingles with audience members at the front of the stage, and encourages everyone to clap and sing along. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)

**Lynyrd Skynyrd:
Pronounced 'Leh-'nérd
'Skin-'nérd & Second
Helping Live from
Jacksonville at the
Florida Theatre ★★1/2**

(2015) 97 min. DVD: \$14.98,
Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail.
from most distributors).



Playing in 2015 at the Florida Theatre in their hometown of Jacksonville, '70s heyday Southern rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd here perform in their entirety the band's 1973 first and 1974 second albums—sort of. The qualifier is because this iteration of Lynyrd Skynyrd is pretty close to a tribute band—boasting only one original member who played on those early albums: guitarist Gary Rossington. Lead singer Ronnie Van Zant, who died along with other band members in a tragic 1977 plane crash, has been replaced with his younger brother, Johnny Van Zant, whose voice sounds similar, although his constant lyric-interpretive hand signals grow tiresome and he takes American flag worship a little too far (one flag on the back of his jacket, another wrapped around the mic stand—Stars and Stripes, not the previously favored controversial Confederate flag). The seven-man band (and two backup singers) delivers the group's signature three-guitar attack—backed by bass, drums, keyboards (and an extra horns and percussion rhythm section on some songs)—on now-classic rock hits including “I Ain’t the One,” “Tuesday’s Gone,” “Simple Man,” and “Call Me the Breeze,” as well as the megahits “Free Bird” and “Sweet Home Alabama” (with its infamous dig against Neil Young, although it would be hard to deny the inspiration of Young’s earlier “The Needle and the Damage Done” on Lynyrd Skynyrd’s hard-rock “The Needle and the Spoon” here). Ultimately, this is a mixed bag. Does Rossington’s extended solo on “Free Bird” still feel like one of the greatest guitar riffs in the history of rock? Yes, it does. But while not quite oldies-tribute-band-on-the-casino-circuit material, this is also not exactly vibrant freeform rock ‘n’ roll (although this band was never much into improv jamming). And the caustic, biting slam against their record label, “Workin’ for MCA,” loses some sting here, considering that the parent label for this release is Universal Music Group (as in formerly MCA/Universal—cue Alanis Morissette). Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a backstage interview with band members. A strong optional purchase. (R. Pitman)

Napoli ★★★

(2014) 105 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99.
Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

A repertoire staple at the Royal Danish

Ballet since its premiere in 1842, August Bournonville’s cheerfully silly combination of pantomime and dance retains considerable charm despite some radical revisions made by the company’s artistic director, Nikolaj Hübbe, and choreographer Sorella Englund in the 2009 version, which is presented here in a 2014 revival. In the first act, fisherman Gennaro and local lass Teresina are madly in love, despite the machinations of two other suitors who try to blacken Gennaro’s reputation. During a boat sailing, however, a storm comes up and Teresina is lost at sea. In the second act, Gennaro ventures to the underwater grotto where his fiancée is being held by the sea spirit Golfo, who has transformed her into a naiad (she remembers nothing of her past). Gennaro manages to awaken Teresina’s memory and take her back, where in the third act the whole of Naples—having turned out for her funeral—instead celebrates the couple’s marriage. This version updates the setting to the 1950s, but a greater shock comes in Act II, when the original score—a hodgepodge of numbers by Edvard Helsted, H.S. Paulli, and H.C. Lumbye—is replaced by a modern one from Louise Alenius, representing a stark shift in styles. Still, the overall result remains engaging, especially since Alban Lendorf and Alexandra Lo Sardo make such an attractive pair as Gennaro and Teresina. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and LPCM stereo, this colorful, unpretentious, whimsical production is recommended. (F. Swietek)



The Passenger ★★1/2

(2010) 161 min. In German w/
English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99,
Blu-ray: \$39.99. Arthaus
Musik/Unitel Classica (dist. by
Naxos of America).

Mieczysław Weinberg, a Polish composer who fled the 1939 Nazi invasion and spent the rest of his life in the Soviet Union, remains relatively unknown despite a prolific output that included seven operas. Presented here in its first fully staged production—at the 2010 Bregenz Festival—*The Passenger* (dating from 1967-68) is obviously a very personal work for Weinberg, most of whose family perished in the death camps. An adaptation of a novel by Auschwitz survivor Zofia Posmysz, the opera centers on Lisa, a onetime female guard at Auschwitz who is now married to Walter, a diplomat. While traveling by ship to Walter’s new post, Lisa becomes convinced that a mysterious woman onboard is actually Martha, a former prisoner Lisa had tried to blackmail by threatening her fiancé Tadeusz with death. The libretto juxtaposes shipboard scenes with flashbacks as Lisa reveals her past to her shocked husband, and it closes with Tadeusz being



hauled off to die and Martha pleading that the dead should never be forgotten nor their killers forgiven. Weinberg’s score carries the narrative along powerfully, becoming transcendent when it incorporates Bach’s famous Chaconne into the final scene—contrasting a musical monument to German genius with Nazi brutality. Mounted on a stunning set, *The Passenger* features intelligent direction by David Pountney, intense orchestral work by the Vienna Symphony under Teodor Currentzis, and committed vocalism by Michelle Breedt (Lisa), Elena Kelessidi (Martha), and other members of the company. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.0 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.0 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Rebel Scum ★★1/2

(2015) 95 min. DVD: \$14.95.
MVD Entertainment Group
(avail. from most distributors).



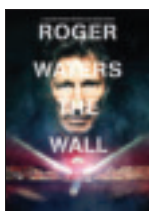
Filmmaker Video Rahim’s *Rebel Scum*—a profile of Knoxville country-punk quartet Dirty Works—is one of those music documentaries that focus more on the antics of a band than on the music they make. Front man Christopher Scum is such a physically unhinged performer that he leaves shows covered in blood—from hitting his face with the microphone. Christopher is also a heroin addict who maintains his equilibrium by way of methadone, much like his girlfriend, Renee (sadly, she died in a car accident after filming wrapped). Although he grew up in Ohio, Christopher ended up in the South when he ran away from home to live with his aunt. About his addiction, he says he was hyperactive as a kid and that his parents put him on Ritalin, which he believes made him susceptible to heroin. His band mates include guitarist Steven Crime, bass player Shaggy, and drummer Bernard, while peripheral characters include trusty roadie Drew and profane neighbor Lumpy. During the course of the film, the band spends more time partying than either rehearsing or performing. Collateral damage along the way includes Steven’s jail sentence for a DUI, Shaggy’s ouster from the group, and Christopher’s repeated attempts to set his hair on fire (failing only because the filmmaker stops him). Somehow, the four make it to the end of this film alive, although not all of their drug and alcohol-addicted friends are quite so lucky. Extras include a “making-of” featurette, film premiere segment, music video, and NPR coverage. A disturbing portrait of the darker side of rock ‘n’ roll, this is a strong optional purchase. (K. Femmessy)

Roger Waters: The Wall ★★★

(2015) 133 min. DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$22.98.
Universal Studios Home Entertainment (avail. from
most distributors).

Roger Waters and Sean Evans co-directed

this film capturing Waters's *The Wall Live* tour, which became the highest-grossing solo tour in history. In between performances of songs from Pink Floyd's classic 1979 album, the film inserts scenes of Waters driving through France and Italy while reflecting on the father and grandfather he lost to war. It's like two films in one, with the road trip offering a respite from the busyness of the stage sets that feature animated segments, puppet sequences, and dramatic lighting (11 musicians fill out the sound, including G.E. Smith on guitar). In concert, Waters conjures up the past by singing "Mother" paired to footage of his 1980 self, whom he dismisses as "fucked up little Roger from all those years ago." In France, Waters's adult children join him to visit their great-grandfather's grave site. He also meets up with director Peter Medak, who describes his wartime escape from Hungary (oddly, Waters doesn't identify Medak). There appears to be a twofold goal at work here: to protest the futility of war while also recognizing those who lost their lives to it. A worthy aim, but Waters makes a tactical error when he appears clad in a Gestapo-style trench coat against a red and black background of Fascist imagery as planes appear to dive-bomb the stage. Audience members raise their arms, and it looks like they are at a Nazi rally—the intended effect, but it plays more like endorsement than critique. On the plus side, the Blu-ray release offers a bonus disc with live performances of "Comfortably Numb" and "Outside the Wall" featuring Waters's former band mates David Gilmour and Nick Mason, as well as extra segments. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 on DVD, and Dolby TrueHD 7.1 on Blu-ray, extras on both formats include "A Visit to Frank Thompson" (with Waters at the grave of a war hero) and "Time Lapses" (with footage from Athens and Buenos Aires). Sure to be popular, this is recommended, overall. (K. Fennessy)



Scorpions: Forever and a Day ★★★

(2015) 100 min. In German w/English subtitles. DVD or Blu-ray: \$19.95. MVD Entertainment Group (avail. from most distributors).

After playing music for 50 years and selling 100 million records, the German metal band the Scorpions embark on their final tour in Katja Von Garnier's documentary. Recalling their history while spending 18 months traveling to Thailand, Beirut, and other cities, singer Klaus Meine says he met the brother he never had when he connected with guitarist Rudolf Schenker in Hanover, discovering that they shared similar goals and influences (through much of the decade, Rudolf's brother, Michael, also



played with the band). Once they filled out their ranks, the Scorpions won a battle of the bands that resulted in a recording contract. Now, the group is a more international affair, with American drummer James Kottak, who joined in 1996, and Polish bass player Paweł Maciwoda, who signed on in 2003. During their farewell tour, the Scorpions also play Moscow, significant because their 1990 song "Wind of Change" struck such a chord that they recorded a version in Russian, which led to a meeting with Gorbachev. The former Soviet Union president remembers, "That was a time when rock gained recognition." If the beginning of the 1990s represented a high, the band soon experienced new lows as their music fell out of fashion, but still they persevered through Meine's throat problems and an ill-fated flirtation with dance music. The singer regrets that they were never as popular in Germany as they were in other countries, such as France, where "Still Loving You" became the country's top-selling single. Other speakers include KISS's Paul Stanley, former drummer Herman Rarebell, and longtime producer Dieter Dierks. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Turandot ★★★

(2015) 125 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. C Major/Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).

Spectacle is often a major selling point in the productions mounted by the Brengenz Festival, with its huge stage at the edge of Lake Constance (facing an arena that seats 7,000). In this 2015 staging by Marco Arturo Marelli of Puccini's final opera, however, the flamboyance is easily matched by an impressive musical performance (with the standard Alfano completion). Fire-juggling acrobats and ninja-like figures (as well as a commedia dell'arte clown) occasionally dart about the stage, which is dominated by a sweeping version of the Great Wall (partially rigged to collapse in an early scene). Among the supernumeraries, moreover, are men who look like terracotta figures, although outfitted in Mao-era suits. That anachronistic touch is characteristic: while most of the Chinese characters are dressed in traditional garb, the hero Calaf—who beats the imperious titular princess at the game of riddles that dooms most of her suitors—is made up to resemble the composer himself in his last days, and the three court ministers likewise wear early-20th-century suits, although sometimes with brightly colored robes. The visual splendor is nicely complemented by excellent vocalism, especially from Riccardo Massi (Calaf), Mlada Khudoley (Turandot), and Guanqun Yu (Liu), as well as strong playing by the Vienna Symphony under Paolo Carignani. Presented in DTS 5.0 and PCM stereo, this



eye-catching, musically vivid rendition is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Unity: The Latin Tribute to Michael Jackson ★★★

(2015) 60 min. DVD: \$19.99 (\$49.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-537-8.

Produced by Peruvian-American musician Tony Succar, this PBS-aired tribute to the hit songs of Michael Jackson as performed by Latin instrumentalists and singers is an unexpected treat, offering lots of musical color and flavor that brings a whole new dimension to familiar music. Shot in a small venue with a large ensemble of players, standout tracks here include Jean Rodriguez's powerful take on "Billie Jean," Kevin Ceballo's spirited cover of "Man in the Mirror" (as well as his playful versions of "Thriller" and "Black or White"), Obie Bermudez and Jennifer Pena's silky, Spanish-language duet on "I Just Can't Stop Loving You," Jon Secada's thoughtful "Human Nature," and India's "Earth Song." Featuring fine vocal work backed by expressive music, *Unity* reworks classic radio pop songs with extended salsa jams and percussion solos. Presented in 5.1 surround sound, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)



Whole Lotta Mugge

Renowned documentary filmmaker Robert Mugge is showcased with the recent release of two newly restored films that illustrate his talent for capturing music and dance around the world.

Gil Scott-Heron in Black Wax (MVD Entertainment Group, DVD or Blu-ray: \$19.95). The spotlight shines on singer-songwriter and hip-hop forefather Gil Scott-Heron in director Robert Mugge's 1982 documentary. Extras include the companion short subject *Is That Jazz?*



Hawaiian Rainbow & Kumu Hula: Keepers of a Culture (MVD Entertainment Group, DVD: \$19.95). Inspired by the state's culture and history, director Robert Mugge combined forces with future Hawaiian governor (from 2010-14) Dr. Neil Abercrombie to motivate the Hawaii State Legislature to fund these educational films: 1987's *Hawaiian Rainbow* on music and dance styles, and 1989's *Kumu Hula: Keepers of a Culture*, which explores hula tradition through the generations.



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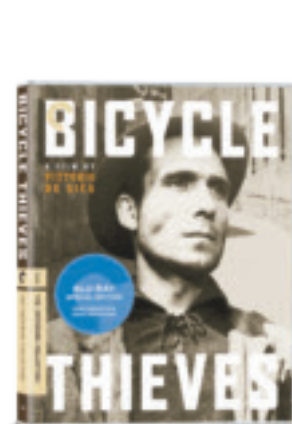
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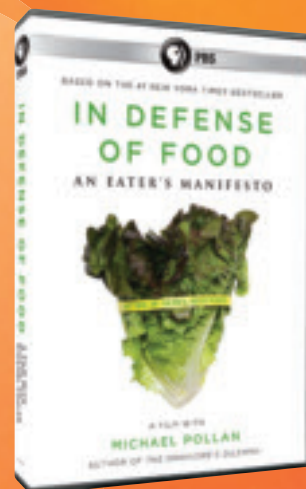
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for the new year."
– Mother Nature Network*

*"Eat food. Not too much.
Mostly plants."*

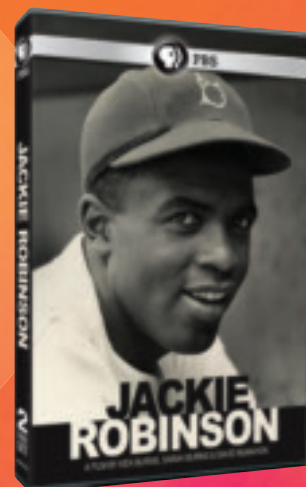
With those seven words, journalist Michael Pollan distills a career's worth of reporting into a prescription for reversing the damage being done to people's health by today's industrially driven Western diet.

Item #: IDOF601
~~\$24.99~~ **\$19.99**



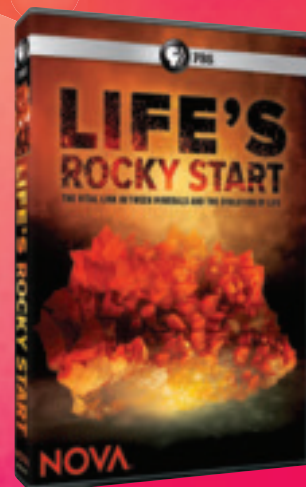
From filmmaker Ken Burns, this powerful film tells the inspiring story of Jackie Roosevelt Robinson, a sharecropper's son who elevated an entire race and country when he broke major league baseball's color barrier in 1947 and became a leader and icon of the civil rights movement.

Item #: JAR0600
~~\$24.99~~ **\$19.99**



Four and a half billion years ago, how did life emerge on Earth? NOVA joins Robert Hazen as he advances a startling idea: that the rocks on Earth were not only essential to jump-starting life, but that, life helped give birth to hundreds of minerals we rely upon today.

Item #: NOVA6317
~~\$24.99~~ **\$19.99**



PBS | Educational Media

Sex! Sex! Sex!

Ok, now that I have your complete, undivided, and possibly somewhat breathless attention, let's talk about sex. Or, more specifically, sex in cinema.

During editing for this issue, our associate editor, Jazza Williams-Wood—who is an excellent young thirtysomething wielder of the red pen—crossed out a remark in reviewer Tom Keogh's write-up on Norwegian director Eskil Vogt's feature film *Blind*. The line in question referred to "brief explicit images of downloaded pornographic content."

Jazza felt that the tacked-on clause coming at the end of the review was a little awkward (true) and that brief explicit images were "not really a big deal" (egads!).

Over the past decade-plus, Jazza and I have had our editorial differences. She, for instance, will always change my "U.K." to "UK," and I, in turn, will always ignore it. Like civil politicians (surely an oxymoron), we agree to disagree.

But on the sex thing, well, following further discussion (Peoria was mentioned), we agreed that *Video Librarian* would continue to alert readers whenever films featured naughty bits "commingling" (in the famous

words of the visibly disgusted priest in *Harold and Maude*).

Still, I can't argue the fact that our contemporary world is nothing like the one 30 years ago in which I was building a video collection for a public library (as I recall, my biggest challenge was keeping copies of *The Last Temptation of Christ*—which kept magically disappearing—on the shelves).

How different is it?

Item: *Playboy* no longer has nudity (too blasé in the Internet age of readily available porn).

Item: *Sports Illustrated* features a plus-sized woman on the front of its Swimsuit Issue.

Item: *Library Journal* now has a book review section devoted to "Erotica."

Item: *Video Librarian* has its first transgender woman on the cover.

Today, Edwin Meese would be having apoplectic fits.

But getting back to sex in cinema: longtime readers of *Video Librarian* are undoubtedly aware that we use a code word for movies or documentaries featuring sexually-explicit material. You will see this at the end of the review for *Blind*: "Highly recommended for more *adventurous* collections [italics added]." Over the years, we have used this word sparingly (in this

particular sense), but in this issue alone three others films also warrant that term: Austrian director Ulrich Seidl's *In the Basement* (with S&M scenes that are more than 50 shades of grey); *Sticky: A (Self) Love Story*, Nicholas Tana's documentary about masturbation; and Italian filmmaker Tinto Brass's 1994 erotic semi-classic *The Voyeur* (featuring prosthetic penises).

Sex in cinema is on the rise. We used the word "adventurous" in its coded alternate sense a total of six times in 2015; in this issue alone, it appears four times (and for you print subscribers looking for a good reason to upgrade to *Video Librarian Plus!*, let me just say that a librarian could build a fairly decent films-with-a-touch-of-porn collection just by doing a text search on "adventurous" in our online review database).

Of course, we will still alert readers about graphic content, and librarians will continue to make selections suitable for their individual communities.

And speaking of sex, when you see a reference to the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the U.K." actually printed as "Anarchy in the UK," you will know that the editorial mantle has officially been passed.

Randy Pitman



APRIL 2 is World Autism Awareness Day

Autism America



20% OFF CODE VL316

87 MINS | CLOSED CAPTIONED

Putting the puzzle together one beautiful piece at a time

From moderate cases to extreme, the film explores what it's like living with autism on a day-to-day basis. Chapters

"I think this movie might be good for people who do not understand what the word Autism means so that they may realize all that we bring." *Conner B. 22 years old ~ Film reviewer living inside the autism spectrum*

"The world has two choices: We can have elephants or we can have ivory trade. We can't have both."

Allan Thornton
Environmental Investigation Agency

GAMBLING ON EXTINCTION

52 MINS | CLOSED CAPTIONED

HABITAT - PIKA, PIKA - RIVER RUN - WEB OF LIFE - IF I WERE A TREE - BUFFALO LOVE, and more

A Kid for the Wild

11 catchy ecology music videos set in Yellowstone

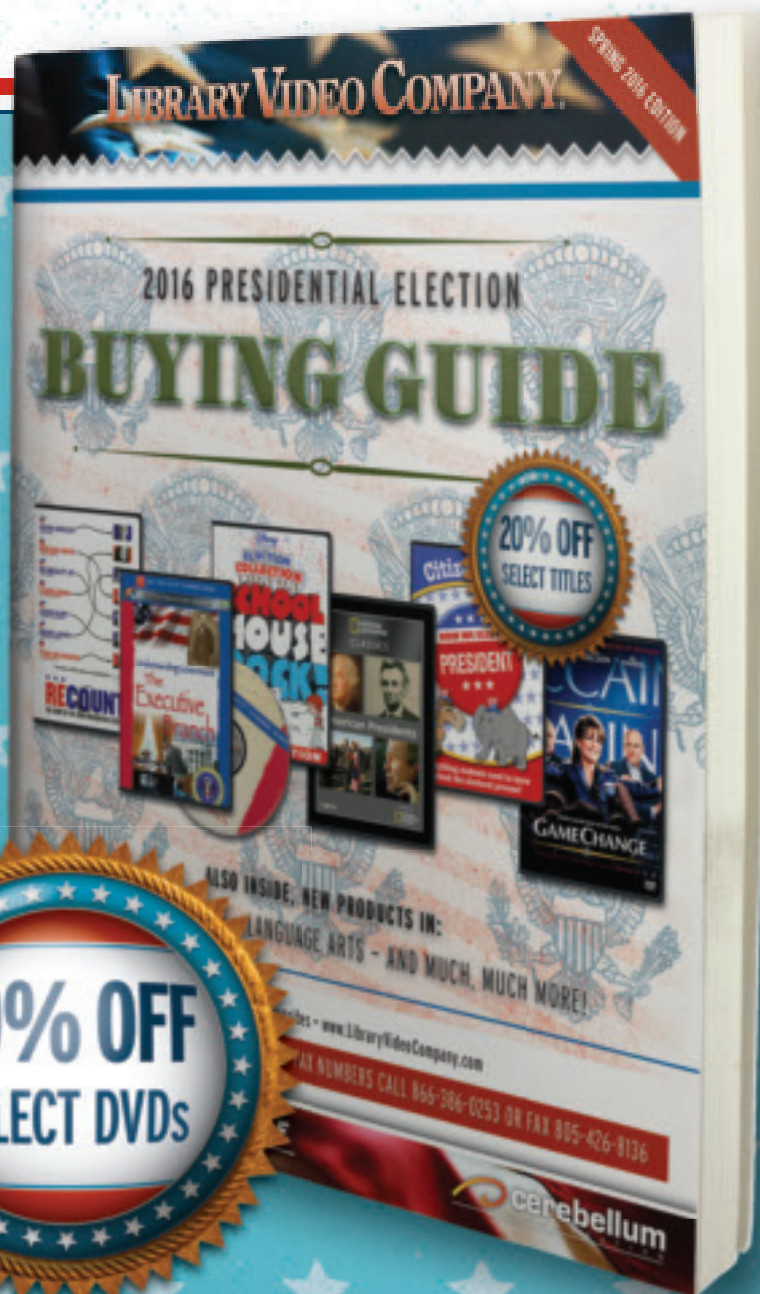


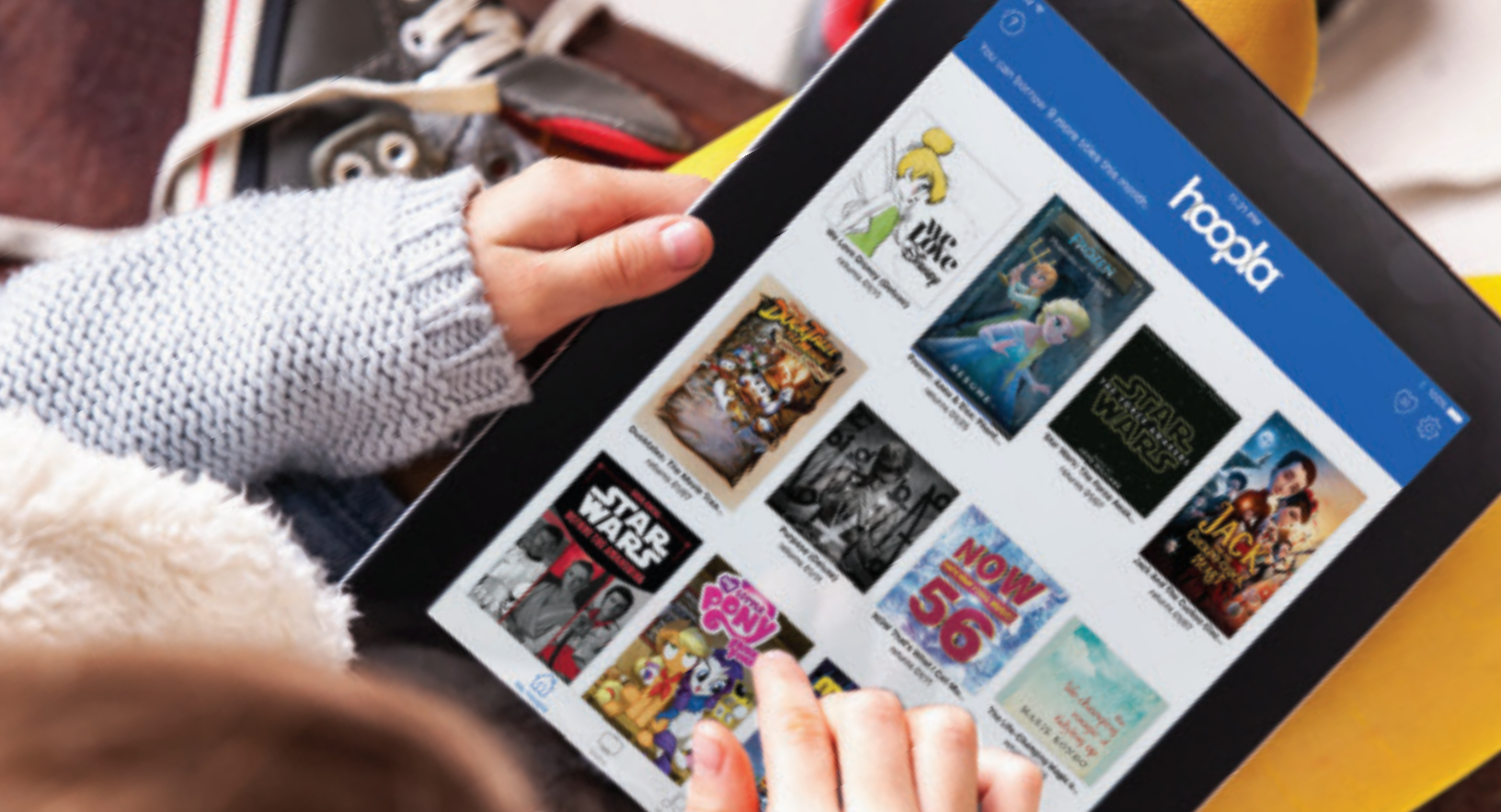
FILMS FOR EARTH DAY TRASHED, SAND WARS, WHO BOMBED JUDI BARI, THE HIGH COST OF CHEAP GAS, BLUEBIRD MAN, NEW FARMS-BIG SUCCESS, LITTLE MISS DEWIE

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