

By Glenn Kay



For the Sun

Welcome to another edition running down many of the new Blu-rays and DVDs hitting store shelves. You'll find plenty of notable films, interesting independents, and a few high-definition upgrades of familiar features from the past. So, if you can't, or shouldn't be heading out to the movies this week, be sure to give one of these titles a try!

BIG NEW RELEASES!

BEATS: Set in 1994, this Scottish feature follows a pair of teens who share a deep appreciation of electronic dance music. With the two about to finish high school and go their separate ways, they realize that their time together is nearing an end. When the government imposes a ban on all dance raves, the leads decide that their final celebration will be to attend an illegal rave in a cave on the outskirts of town. The press liked this film a great deal and the majority of write-ups were positive.

One sole voice thought the story and scale of the feature was too small and unrelatable. Everyone else thought it perfectly captured the era's rave craze and presented an engaging story with interesting characters. They even noted that the film managed to resonate with them on an emotional level. It features Cristian Ortega, Lorn Macdonald, Laura Fraser, Martin Donaghy, Brian Ferguson and Rachel Jackson.

BLITHE SPIRIT: Based on a work by author Noel Coward, this comedy follows a spiritualist/medium who is hired by an author suffering from writer's block to hold an inspirational séance. He travels out to the site with his wife and manages to raise a spirit, but is shocked to learn that the ghostly presence is his previous spouse who died a few years earlier. This spirit is none-too-happy that her husband has moved on, causing friction for all of the attendees. Despite a great cast, the final results underwhelmed critics.

A number of them called the film a fast-paced and breezy screwball comedy with a few amusing turns. However, the majority complained that the story and jokes were dated and that the flat and static camera and editing techniques made the experience a slog. Dan Stevens, Judi Dench, Leslie Mann, Isla Fisher and Aimee-Ffion Edwards headline the film.

C.I.APE: A villainous figure decides to take over the world with a new secret weapon. When a young C.I.A. employee learns about the threat, she makes an odd suggestion to her superiors. The lead asserts that the new agent she has been training is the world's only hope to neutralize the threat. Of course, she's referring to a talking chimp (but curiously enough, not an ape).

Anyway, she coaches the primate on a mission to save the day. This picture debuted on streaming platforms last week and is now arriving as a DVD-only release. There are no reviews available, but it seems clear that this title has been made exclusively for young viewers. And a wince-inducing trailer that showcases the talking, CGI-chimp doesn't make the movie look promising.

The cast includes [Sophia Alongi](#) , [Skip Schwink](#) , [Madelyn Kientz](#) , [Leah N.H. Philpott](#) and [Scott Anthony Gould](#) as the voice of the chimp.

CRAZY ABOUT YOU: Also released under the title, "The Naked Wanderer," this Australian tale follows a man who is devastated after his girlfriend turns down his marriage proposal. Unsure of what to do next with his life, the protagonist decides to walk up the entire western coast of Australia for charity ... and do it without any clothing. Along the way, he braves the unforgiving elements and meets new animals, and several surprised people. This comedy was released in its homeland before the pandemic and is now arriving in North America on streaming platforms and DVD.

Reaction toward the film has been a little tepid. Notices that have appeared call it a sweet flick with a likable lead, but suggest it suffers from bland direction and a lack of tension or thrills. The movie stars Angus McLaren, Sophie Kennedy Clark, Natasha Liu Bordizzo and John Cleese.

A DIM VALLEY: In this independent comedy, a biologist heads out to a cabin in the woods with his graduate students. They collect butterflies, soil and mosses for their studies. When a group of backpackers unexpectedly arrive looking for a place to stay, the team shares their accommodations. Over the course of the next few days, the characters begin to question their life choices.

This small feature earned more positive reviews than negative ones. Those who disliked the movie suggested it was performed in far too low-key and deadpan a manner, failing to connect or register on an emotional level. Reviewers who enjoyed it commented that the script was interesting and that the dreamy journey of the protagonist was intriguing to watch. Robert Longstreet, Rosalie Lowe, Rachel McKeon and Whitmer Thomas headline the film.

THE FOREVER PURGE: This is the fifth feature in “The Purge” franchise and has been promoted as the last in the series. It is set in a world where, for one evening a year, murder and crime is legal. The leads in this film live in Texas and decide to lock themselves inside their homes and wait out the ordeal. However, when the morning comes, the group discovers that a sizable mob has decided to continue murdering people, mostly targeting immigrants.

Terrified, the protagonists try to escape to safety in Mexico. This follow-up split the press. Half stated that they were tired of the franchise and that this sequel didn’t work as a political commentary. Roughly the same number countered that the movie’s message felt on point and called it a tense exercise that provided plenty of B-movie thrills. It stars Ana de la Reguera, Josh Lucas, Tenoch Huerta, Leven Rambin, Will Patton and Cassidy Freeman.

NEVER GONNA SNOW AGAIN: A Russian masseuse arrives in Poland and immediately wanders into a gated community. Once there, he introduces himself and begins providing services to the downcast locals. Using techniques that resemble hypnosis, the neighborhood finds itself drawn to the man. He helps them unlock their inner wishes and deal with various issues and troubles in their lives.

This foreign-language comedy/drama earned raves from critics. One or two of them thought that it looked beautiful, but couldn't figure out exactly what the movie was trying to say. However, everyone else stated that while the movie would require some interpretation, it was sweet and completely unique. A few even commented that they were enraptured by the main character and the feature's strange charms.

The credited cast includes Alec Utgoff, Maja Ostaszewska, Agata Kulesza and Weronika Rosati.

SKIPPING STONES: More than a decade after a tragic accident resulted in the passing of a young man, the sister and best friend of the deceased, still haven't come to terms with the loss. The friend returns to his hometown to settle personal affairs and reunites with the sister, who explains that she still feels trapped under the weight of her parents' grief. The two attempt to help each other process the death and move forward. There aren't many reviews available for this independent drama at present.

Still, it played a few film festivals over the past couple of years and earned a few nods and prizes. One online review that has appeared calls the picture a moving story that deals sensitively with its subject matter. Nathaniel Ansbach, Gabrielle Kalomiris, Michael Ironside and Patricia Charbonneau headline the feature.

THE SPARKS BROTHERS: This documentary tells the story of musicians Ron and Russell Mael, who are considered legends in the Los Angeles music scene. Despite not being well-known to the masses, the pair has recorded more than 25 albums since the early 1970s and has influenced many later acts. In fact, they were largely responsible for the new musical, "Annette" with Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard (which is available on Amazon Prime). Director Edgar Wright ("Shaun of the Dead," "Hot Fuzz," and, "Baby Driver") interviews the two men and utilizes interviews from fans like Beck, Flea, Jason Schwartzman and Jane Wiedlin to fill viewers in on these artists and their importance in the music scene.

The press was generally thrilled by this feature. There were a few who weren't fans of the artist's work and thought the film was overlong and repetitive. However, the overwhelming majority called it a fantastic tribute that was as entertainingly quirky as the siblings themselves and would likely introduce a new and bigger audience to these musicians.

TWIST: “Oliver Twist” gets a modern-day update in this British feature. A youngster living on the streets of London tries to make his mark in the world with elaborate spray-paintings. He’s discovered and taken to the elderly leader of a young crew of hustlers, hackers, and parkour/free-runners. Together, the team takes on an elaborate and dangerous heist to steal paintings that their mastermind says were stolen from him.

However, when push comes to shove, the protagonist begins to wonder if he can trust all of his new associates. This movie was roundly panned by just about every member of the press. One or two thought that the movie might entertain tweens, but the overall consensus was that the movie was preposterous, clichéd, and that the story got tiring very quickly. It stars Michael Caine, Rita Ora, Noel Clarke, Sophie Simnett, Jason Maza, David Walliams and Lena Headey.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

Arrow Video is excited to deliver some new Blu-rays to movie collectors. The first is a 4K edition of “Children of the Corn” (1984), an adaptation of the well-known Stephen King story. It follows a couple who visits a small town, only to discover that a cult of kids has murdered all of the adults and are following the leadership of a monster in the cornfields. This movie has been given a “Special Edition” which presents a new 4K restoration of the film for readers who own high-definition televisions.

All of the extras have also been ported over from previous editions, including multiple commentary tracks, a retrospective making-of, as well as interviews with cast and crew and publicity materials.

The distributor’s most notable release this week is “Legend” (1985), an elaborate fantasy film starring Tom Cruise, Tim Curry and Mia Sarah. Directed by Ridley Scott (“Alien,” “Blade Runner,” “Thelma & Louise,” “Gladiator,” “Prometheus,” “The Martian”), the picture is notable for its eye-popping production design and cinematography. This 2-disc limited edition includes a 2K restoration of the theatrical cut and a director’s cut on the second disc that is considerably longer and has a completely different score.

Bonuses on the first disc include a film historian commentary, an isolated music track, a featurette on the production, a 2003 documentary on Scott, the Bryan Ferry music video for the

film, a visual essay on the differences between the music and the two cuts themselves. On the second, Scott provides a commentary track and there's a lengthy 2002 documentary on the production. You'll also receive an alternate opening and deleted scenes, storyboard galleries, two drafts of the screenplay, different footage from the overseas release, publicity materials, and more. If you like this movie, then you'll definitely need to pick the Blu-ray up.

And Kino has plenty of new Blu-rays coming your way. "13 Washington Square" (1928) is an early silent romantic-comedy from Universal Pictures. The feature has received a 4K restoration for Blu-ray and arrives with a film historian commentary and a new music track. Also arriving with a similar set of bonuses is "A Full Day's Work" (1973), which is a French crime-comedy.

It's about a father who decides to murder the nine jury members who convicted his son. The distributor also has a Blu-ray of the silent horror classic, "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" (1923), starring Lon Chaney as the titular monster. This disc includes a critic commentary, an essay on the film, a newsreel with home-movie Chaney, some recently recorded music for the feature, as well as a slideshow of production correspondence and production stills.

You can also pick up "The Hunter Will Get You" (1976), a French crime flick about a mercenary working for a police force. The disc includes a film historian audio track, an interview with the writer/director and a trailer. "Illustrious Corpses" (1976) is another Gallic title in the same genre about a detective on a case that involves murders of some Supreme Court justices. The Blu-ray includes a 4K restoration of the movie, a commentary by filmmaker Alex Cox, and a trailer.

"Lucky Luciano" (1973) is a biopic of the famous mobster that features Vincent Gardenia and Rod Steiger in supporting roles. The Blu-ray presents the film with a new 4K restoration and comes with a critic commentary and trailers. Those looking for something funnier can try "Masquerade" (1965), an international spy caper with Cliff Robertson. This release includes a 2K master of the film, a film expert commentary and a trailer.

And the distributor is putting out a Blu-ray of "Seven Days ... Seven Nights" (1960). This is a French title about two strangers who witness a murder and fall in love while waiting to testify. The distributor is teaming up with Code Red for the Blu-ray of "Story of a Woman" (1970), an Italian drama about a woman who reunites with a man with whom she once had an affair.

Criterion has some noteworthy Blu-ray releases as well. “The Damned” (1969) from Luchino Visconti (“The Leopard,” “Death in Venice”) is about a wealthy industrialist whose family is slowly torn apart during the reign of the Third Reich. The disc includes a 2K digital restoration of the film, an alternate Italian soundtrack, a 1970 interview with Visconti, archived discussions with cast members Helmut Berger, Ingrid Thulin and Charlotte Rampling, a behind-the-scenes documentary on the picture, a featurette on the sexual politics in the movie, and more bonuses.

They also have an impressive Blu-ray box set called “Melvin Van Peebles: Four Films.” It contains some of the famous African-American filmmaker’s most notable efforts that include, “The Story of a Three-Day Pass” (1967) and “Watermelon Man” (1970), a film that marked his only foray into Hollywood studio filmmaking. Van Peebles’ most famous title, “Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song” (1971) is also included in the set, as well as “Don’t Play Us Cheap” (1972), an adaptation of a Tony-award winning musical.

All four films have received 4K digital restorations and it appears as though the moviemaker’s son, Mario Van Peebles, has been significantly involved in this edition. In fact, he talks with various film historians about his father’s movies. Mario Van Peebles 2003 film “Baadasssss!” is also included. The fictional movie was inspired by diary entries and ideas written by his dad.

This bonus includes a commentary featuring both Mario and Melvin Van Peebles. If that wasn’t enough, there are other extras like a director commentary and a making-of featurette on “Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song,” three early shorts directed by the moviemaker, a 2005 documentary about Van Peebles, multiple interviews with the figure from various promotional tours, not to mention introductions to all of the movies by their creator. This looks like another great release!

AGFA is also releasing a Blu-ray with multiple titles. It’s called “What Really Happened to Baby Jane?” and the “Films of the Gay Girls Riding Club,” and it includes a series of pictures made between 1962 and 1972 by Ray Harrison. The filmmaker was noted for making spoofs of various Hollywood hits with drag queens. All of the features arrive on Blu-ray with 2K preservations and/or restorations from the only known 16mm prints in existence.

It includes outtakes from one of the titles and the main feature comes with a commentary from a queer film historian.

Severin is presenting a Blu-ray of “A Day of Judgment” (1981). This is an obscure slasher picture about a mysterious figure stalking a community with a scythe. It comes with a 2K restoration of the film, an interview with a genre film critic about the movie, and a discussion with the director and writer.

The company’s big Blu-ray release this week may be “Drop Dead Fred” (1991), a cult comedy starring Phoebe Cates and Rik Mayall. It’s about a put-upon woman whose imaginary childhood friend appears to wreak juvenile havoc on those who have wronged her. Critics despised this movie when it originally played at theaters and it flopped at the box office. However, as time has passed some reviewers have come around to the movie.

It is now appearing on Blu-ray in North America for the first time ever. The picture has received a 2K restoration and comes with a director audio commentary, a conversation with the filmmaker and the producer, interviews with the co-writers and executive producers, as well as discussions with the visual effects team. There’s even an interview with co-star Ashley Peldon and a text interview with Phoebe Cates. Deleted scenes and outtakes and a trailer are also included.

Is the movie a misjudged masterpiece or are its fans completely off-base? Now you can find out for yourself.

Of course, Severin also has some horror titles coming your way. “The Fourth Victim” (1971) is an Italian/Spanish genre film about a man whose wives keep dying mysteriously. The Blu-ray comes with a 2K restoration, an interview with the biographer of the director, a deleted scene and a trailer. “Midnight” (1982) from John Russo (co-writer of “Night of the Living Dead”) features a group of teens being murdered by Satanists.

The Blu-ray includes a 4K restoration of the film, an interview with Russo, the producer, a cast member John Amplas and effects artist Tom Savini. It also comes with promotional clips.

SRS Cinema is releasing a Blu-ray with a limited run of 1000 copies. The film in question is the wild Japanese feature, “The Legend of the Stardust Brothers” (1985). According to reports, the movie must be seen to be believed. The story involves a pair of aspiring musicians with backgrounds in punk and new wave music.

When their sinister manager tries to transform them into a pop duo, the two find out that being famous isn't all its cracked up to be, and try to fight for their freedom. At one point, they even take on a bizarre monster. This cult item has received good reviews that call it a blast of campy fun. A new master of the director's cut has been used for the movie's North American Blu-ray premiere.

Vinegar Syndrome is always putting out great cult items on Blu-ray with fantastic restorations and loads of bonus features. It appears as though their latest batch of titles is being made available primarily through their website. This week, you can pick up "Blades" (1989) as well as "Devil Story" (1986) and "Girls School Screammers" (1985). They also have a Blu-ray of the serial killer thriller "Resurrection" (1999), which reunites the director and star of the 1980s cult flick "Highlander."

And the company will be putting out the Hitchcock-inspired thriller "Shallow Grave" (1984). All of these discs are jam-packed with extras, so those who are interested would be well-advised to check out the distributor's website.

And there's more! Media Blasters is presenting the Japanese effort "Black Belt" (2007). This is a period martial arts film about three karate pupils whose lives take different turns after leaving their dojo. "Shadow: Dead Riot" (2006) is an American independent horror feature starring Tony Todd about an undead serial killer who leads a force of zombies against some incarcerated women at a penitentiary. This disc is supposed to include special features, but the specifics haven't been announced yet.

They also have a Blu-ray of the Japanese chiller "X-Cross" (2007). This tale follows a woman visiting a remote health spa who discovers that the locals are raging psychopaths.

Speaking of maniacs, Saturn's Core Audio & Video is presenting "Psycho Sisters" (1998) on Blu-ray. It has been described by some genre critics as an amusingly trashy little exploitation movie about a murdering pair of siblings. The disc includes a new transfer of the feature from the original S-VHS master (guess it was shot on a videocamera), as well as a demo video for the film, an afterword with the director, interviews with the cast and crew, and shorts from the moviemaker and other bonuses.

Paramount is digging into its vaults to bring back the underrated comedy “Clue” (1985) on Blu-ray. Based on the board game, this film features an incredible cast playing guests at a dinner party who must determine who among them committed murder. When the film was originally released at theaters, it had three completely different endings (depending on which theater and screening you happened to attend). Naturally, the disc will also contain all of the alternate closings for your perusal.

Paramount is also re-releasing “G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra” (2009) and “G.I. Joe: Retaliation” (2013) on disc for enthusiasts of the series.

With “The Forever Purge” hitting Blu-ray this week, Universal Pictures has decided to make “The Purge: 5-Movie Collection” available for purchase. It collects all of the films in the franchise together in one box.

Finally, Warner Archive is releasing a Blu-ray of the classic Marx Brothers comedy “A Night at the Opera” (1935). The story follows the comedians as they try to help a young opera singer and cause chaos onstage during a big performance. It is considered by many to be the team’s best work and the made-to-order disc of the feature will be available through Amazon.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

There is not a lot of great stuff for kids this week, so be warned before making any purchases.

“C.I.Ape”

ON THE TUBE!

And you'll find a listing of most of the TV-themed releases coming your way below.

“Emergency” The Complete Series

“A House Divided” Season 3

“The Mysteries of Mental Illness” (PBS)

“Nancy Drew” Season 1

“Nancy Drew” Season 2

“Rick & Morty” Season 4

“Robotech – Part 1: The Macross Saga” (Japanese animated series)

“Whitstable Pearl” (Acorn)

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