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DVDs: The Abortion Movie

Posted June 18, 2008 | 07:01 PM (EST)



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You know a movie is special when people in opposite camps of a polarizing issue claim it speaks for them. That's what has happened with *4 Months 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (\$24.95; Genius). I first saw it at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival (hey, I spend \$3000 of my own money going there, so I like to work it into conversations whenever possible) and I loved it. But I never considered for a moment it was a movie about abortion. Set in Romania just before the fall of

Communism, it tells the story of a young woman helping her somewhat hapless college roommate arrange a back alley abortion. Like the movies of the Dardennes brothers, this film stays right on top of its characters and we watch them frantically navigate a world of suspicion and deceit where anything can be had for a price and no one can be trusted. I left the movie thinking a lot more about totalitarian governments than I did about abortion. But that was the angle that caught people's eye in the US. Some saw it as depicting the frightening world where an abortion can only be had by becoming a criminal. Others saw it as depicting the horrors of abortion itself. I think this film has a lot more in common with the German film *The Lives Of Others* (which shows a poisonous world of secrets and spies) rather than say Tony Kaye's provocative *Lake Of Fire* documentary. Let's put it this way: wherever you fall on the debate of choice/abortion, this movie will give you food for thought. And if that issue doesn't inflame your passions, this taut, thriller-like drama with a marvelous performance at its heart (Anamaria Marinca) will still absorb you completely.

Also out this week:

The Carmen Miranda Collection (\$49.98; Fox) -- You'd have to be a little camp to take more than a very modest pleasure in the five increasingly repetitive movies featuring the self-satirizing Miranda. But by the far the best is Busby Berkeley's 1943 wig-out *The Gang's All Here*, which has the trippiest finale this side of *Fantasia*. Also on the queer side: Woody Harrelson is a gay male escort for mature women in Paul Schrader's *The Walker* (\$27.98; ThinkFilm), *Shelter* (\$23.95;

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Here) is a gay romance set in the surprisingly homophobic world of surfing (you'd think free spirits like that would be more easy-going, but in the real world no such luck); 1975's *Saturday Night At The Baths* (\$29.95; WaterBearer) is a genuine time capsule with the new piano player at the Continental baths not minding so much when he's hit on; and the Elton John produced body-swapping comedy *It's A Boy/Girl Thing* (\$26.98; Anchor Bay) starring Kevin Zegers of *Transamerica*.

You Think You Really Know Me: The Gary Wilson Story (\$24.99; Plexifilm) -- A fascinating documentary about the eccentric masterpiece created in 1977 by Wilson, who fits comfortably alongside Captain Beefheart and Van Dyke Parks. Bonus: the album is included, which is only fair since no one could watch the movie without wanting to hear it. Also, if *Control* whetted your appetite, check out the fine documentary *Joy Division* (\$22.95; Weinstein/Genius). And good music for a good cause is heard on *TCT (Concerts For Teenage Cancer Trust) At The Royal Albert Hall* (\$14.98; Time Life) with the Who, Noel Gallagher of Oasis, the Cure, Paul Weller, Kaiser Chiefs and more.

The Sword In The Stone (\$29.99; Disney) -- a tale of young King Arthur based loosely on T. H. White's overpraised book *The Once and Future King* (so sue me) and yet even fans of the novel will readily admit this very thin movie has little to offer in imagination or wit or style. The beginning of the end for Disney, until *The Little Mermaid* arrived. *The Jungle Book 2* (\$29.99; Disney) is one of many inferior, direct-to-DVD titles from Disney that to my mind tarnish their newly revived reputation but which get snapped up greedily by families. Thankfully the Pixar people look down on such dross.

So I Married An Axe Murderer (\$19.94; Sony) -- a mild comedy from happier times when Mike Myers could play multiple roles in a movie and no one would expect much so even modest laughs were well-received. (Unlike his new movie, *The Love Guru*, which is getting brutal reviews.)

Popeye The Sailor 1938-1940 (\$34.98; Warner Bros.) -- The spinach-loving hero in his heyday, thanks to the quirky talent of the Fleischers and loads of extras. The less said about the godawful 70s episodes in *Popeye & Friends Volume One* (\$14.98; Warner Bros.) the better.

Etc. -- Finally, it's impossible to stay on top of everything that comes my way, so here are some titles I still need to check out: the gangster drama *Classe Tous Risques* (\$29.95; Criterion); David Duchovny's welcome dive into TV comedy on *Californication First Season* (\$39.99; Showtime), the airplane favorite *Fool's Gold* (\$28.98; Warner Bros.) -- seriously, the last two plane trips I've been on it seemed like this Matthew McConaughey no-brainer was practically the *only* movie anyone watched; *Burn Notice Season One* (\$49.98; Fox), the promising-looking drama about an ex-spy I dipped into but haven't fully absorbed yet; *Rails & Ties* (\$27.98; Warner Bros.), another genuinely indie drama starring Kevin Bacon and Marcia Gay Harden, two actors who've proven their dedication to serious filmmaking again and again; *Weeds Season Three* (\$39.98; Showtime), the comedy my friend Aaron really enjoys and which I can't seem to catch up with yet; and Jack Black's *Be Kind, Rewind* (\$27.98; New Line), a commercial flop co-starring Mos Def, an appealing and talented actor who can't seem to pick good movie scripts but has much better luck onstage.

So did you see *4 Months 3 Weeks and 2 Days* and did you think it was pro-choice, anti-abortion or neither?

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I saw the movie last night. Obviously it's in Romanian. The people speak quickly, there is a lot of back and forth, hard to stay focused w/ subtitles. Imagine a Robert Altman movie w/ subtitles - everyone speaking at once. The first quarter of the picture a product name such as Kent, Palmolive, Marlboro or whatever were mentioned no less than 50 times. Trying to give one a feeling of familiarity, it only reminded me of reading Steven King " annoying. The main protagonist (the abortionist) had lines that did not feel natural. No one speaks that way. Not even in Romania. He coerces sex that appears to be both very rapid and unappealing for him and the also the women involved - pointless. I would imagine most would rather have the leu. Aside from those criticisms, I liked it. The photography really captured the bleakness of the situation. It had an overall feeling of suspense and impending doom. The situations where people had to interact with authority (such as checking into a hotel or riding the bus) give one an appreciation for capitalism. It's like a Dick Cheney wet dream as far as authoritarianism goes. My wife is a Bulgarian immigrant who came to the US right around the time the movie is set. She remarked that the movie was disturbing and well done. The crumbling buildings, rusty soviet cars, and wild dogs in the street looked authentic. Two thumbs up.

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Thanks for the perspective from Eastern Europeans.

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I haven't seen 4 months, and to be honest this is the first I've heard of it and I'll take your word for it and hunt it down. Without even seeing it, from our description I would agree it appears to be more of a movie about totalitarian governments and what they can do to the average citizen just trying to do what is right for them but not, obviously for the state.

I just don't get Californication. I really don't. It just seems listless and somewhat angry so I quit watching it.

I've seen a few Carmen Miranda movies and I'll wait to see her on TCM or Foxmovies which I really like because they show so many movies in widescreen and no commercials.

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I can't stand weeds either. It just turned into a soap opera around pot selling and what could have been done with humor and a serious look at the ridiculous drug laws was turned into something really stupid. I remember the scene where she spread for some lowlife weed dealing mexican(NOT a slam on mexicans it's just what he was) and the second I saw that I said this series is worthless. It made no sense and added nothing to the show.

And after that I watch and it just kept getting dumber and dumber. .

I had a lot of other things to agree with or disagree with you but this danged word limit is for the birds.

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Thanks for commenting and sorry for the word limit. I think it's a little low myself.

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