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Michael Giltz
Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: July 20, 2009 03:20 PM

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# DVDs -- Celebrate Moon Landing With Little Known Classic For All Mankind



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I saw For All Mankind in a nearly empty movie theater back in 1989 and I've been continually surprised ever since how few people know about this engaging, gorgeous and thrilling documentary about the Apollo missions. Criterion has just released a new edition of the film on regular DVD (\$29.95) and BluRay (\$39.98 -- but on sale at Amazon, the BluRay is only \$20 -- \$5 less than the regular DVD! I've only seen the regular DVD). Do yourself and your family a favor and rent or buy it immediately. There's no better way to celebrate the moon

landing.

Like a lot of great documentaries, For All Mankind breaks a lot of rules. Filmmaker Al Reinert (who went on to co-write Ron Howard's best film, Apollo 13) decided to treat all the Apollo missions as essentially one event. His film depicts an idealized journey from the earth to the moon, grabbing footage wherever he found it and even letting the voice of one astronaut describe his emotions while we are watching somebody else. Why? As explained in a very good making-of documentary, Reinert realized that the best launch footage might come from one mission, the best space walk from another (not even an Apollo mission, actually), the best shots inside the capsule from another, the best view of a stage of the rocket breaking off from another and so on. So he just mixed and matched and created the best story he could, without worrying that footage from Apollo 9 might jump to footage from Apollo 4 and be followed by Apollo 13 and so on.

None of this matters when you watch the movie. It's simply a gorgeous, nerve-wracking experience. Your first response is awe; the second response is "Why haven't we ever seen this footage before?" The views of the rocket igniting and launching into space are overwhelming. The

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massive explosions, the roiling flames, and the *noise* help you realize that they don't launch or glide or soar into space -- they *explode* into space and being the guys perched on top of that roman candle has never seemed nuttier. When an astronaut goes for a space walk, it also seems terrifyingly scary...until you're overwhelmed by the sheer beauty of what they're seeing. Then the astronauts are on the moon, rolling around in a car and hopping about while giggling like little kids. Who can blame them? But the images are so sharp, so clear and striking it takes your breath away and you feel jealous all over again for what they got to experience.

All these years, the supplemental footage tells us, we've been watching grainy copies of copies of the same two or three moments. The footage on display in *For All Mankind* was simply never seen before, often even by NASA. Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* came out a year before the moon landing and that film is still revelatory. Sometimes you might have to remind yourself that this footage is REAL and it's really happening. That's how inured to space missions we've become by both the lack of anything beyond the space station (which dulls our realization of how dangerous traveling beyond the Earth can be) and the constant images of it we see in movies. But few movies real or fictional are as gorgeous to behold as this one.

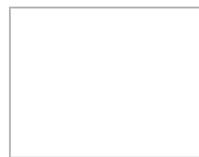
I can't imagine any science teacher who wouldn't want to show this film to their class. I can't imagine any kid who would watch this and not spend at least the next few days saying they want to be an astronaut. I can't imagine any adult not seeing it and appreciating anew the beauty of Earth and the foolhardy, wonderful recklessness of what was accomplished 40 years ago. *For All Mankind* is a classic.

### Other Recent Criterion Releases

As I've said before, you can never go wrong purchasing any film released by Criterion. They're always substantial films produced with loving care and extras that set the industry standard. Every special edition DVD put out by any other studio is just imitating what Criterion pioneered. They've also been smarter than major studios by pricing BluRays the same as their regular DVDs. On sale at Amazon, they're increasingly priced even less since sometimes the extras that need to be on a second regular DVD can fit comfortably onto the much roomier BluRay version. Here are some recent titles of theirs now available. I always try to talk about DVDs within a week or two of their release but Criterion titles are timeless so you can talk about them anytime.

***Last Year at Marienbad*** (\$39.95 for regular or BluRay from Criterion but the regular on sale at Amazon is \$34.99 and the BluRay is only \$19.99) -- OK, I'm not a fan of director Alain Resnais but he's a director you simply have to deal with if you're any sort of film buff and the enigmatic puzzle that is *Last Year At Marienbad* is the principal reason why. This 1961 New Wave landmark virtually defined one half of the twin poles of foreign films for American audiences. On the one hand you had the earthy humor of Fellini and the tantalizing promise of sensuality (foreign films always promised more skin than they delivered but boy were they sophisticated about sex). On the other hand, you had the high art pretensions of Godard and Resnais. Audiences delighted in trying to "figure out" this movie in which guests at a famed exclusive resort may or may not have met there the year before and may or may not have had an affair or be having an affair right now. It's a lot more fun if you don't try to make sense of it. I've compared both the regular DVD and the BluRay and both look gorgeous. Both are loaded with extras, including a new audio interview with Resnais himself, who is still producing inexplicable but playful films even today.

***My Dinner with Andre*** (\$39.95; Criterion) -- It never seemed that audacious to me. A movie about two guys having dinner -- literally a movie in which one guy gets in a cab, arrives and spends almost two hours talking with his friend? Why not? When the two guys are Wallace Shawn and Andre Gregory, it makes even more sense. Gregory spins tale after tale during dinner, fantastical events from his life that quietly glide into fantasy (a faun? Did he say a faun?) and usually seem to end with everyone in the story drinking and dancing until dawn. Director Louis Malle captures it all effortlessly, though the effort in making two guys sitting at a table not become boring seems daunting. But actually, it's not and those filmmakers who edit with a frenzy even the action-packed motion of a concert or car chase should take note. In fact, movies are FILLED with lengthy scenes in which two people simply talk: the centerpiece of the IRA film *Hunger* (which opened earlier this year) involves a lengthy talk between a priest and a prisoner) or the opener of Quentin Tarantino's upcoming *Inglorious Basterds* in which a farmer talks with a Nazi in his farmhouse for about 20 minutes. Both are thoroughly gripping. And so is *My Dinner With Andre* which still seems to flummox people with its premise. I remember my brother's incredulity when I suggested we watch it years ago. "Two guys. Having dinner. That's it?" Half the fun of his watching it was knowing he could go back to his friends the next day and tell them the nutty film I got him to watch. And then, out of nowhere, he became caught up in what they were saying and forgot how ridiculous it was



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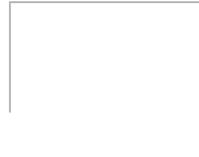
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**Tiny Drizzle Wreaks Havoc In Desert City** SANTIAGO, Chile — In one of the driest regions on earth, even a drizzle

supposed to be. The extras include new interviews with the actors plus a BBC show in which Shawn interviews Malle.

**The Seventh Seal** (\$39.95 on regular or Blu -- I have the regular) / **Bergman Island** (\$19.95; Criterion) -- I have one problem with someone watching *The Seventh Seal* for the first time on DVD: without an audience surrounding you, you probably won't realize how much humor is embedded in this iconic film about a Knight returning from the Crusades and facing off against Death. No, it isn't Woody Allen's *Love & Death*, but there is quite a bit of humor in this allegory (terrible, unfriendly word, that). Bergman became awfully dour in the Seventies and made a string of austere films, but his best works -- like this and the delightful *Wild Strawberries* and *Smiles On A Summer Night* and his last masterpiece *Fanny & Alexander* - have a surprising amount of warmth and humor and joy. *Seal* has a string of extras, including a second disc that contains *Bergman Island*, an 83 minute distillation of a lengthy TV interview that Bergman gave a few years before his death. That's also available on its own, but I'm sorry they're only putting out the theatrical version, since the complete TV interviews run for hours in length and are absorbing. Still, *Bergman Island* does give you the greatest hits of this final look at the director and his life.

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Thanks for the great post about "For All Mankind"--I bought the Criterion DVD at Barnes &

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by Michael Giltz

Noble last week (there was a sale on Criterion DVDs, and I also bought the Criterion edition of "The Third Man"). "For All Mankind" is the definitive documentary, in my opinion about the space program!

BTW, last night Turner Classic Movies aired "The Right Stuff" in honor of the 40th anniversary of the first moon landing. For a Hollywood depiction of the early days of the space race, nothing can top "The Right Stuff"--great script and one of the best ensemble casts EVER!

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 **mgorbet** *I'm a Fan of mgorbet* [permalink](#)

For All Mankind is also available for free on-demand on

<http://www.theauteurs.com>

<http://www.theauteurs.com/films/599>

(The Auteurs also has tons of other fantastic classics. Worth checking out)

I watched it a few weeks ago and had the same reaction -- why don't more people know about this film?

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 **Tallulah Morehead - Huffpost Blogger** *I'm a Fan of Tallulah Morehead* [permalink](#)



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One doesn't need to buy FOR ALL MANKIND. It's on TCM today. I had already set my DVR to record it before reading this very interesting review.

I have attempted to watch MY DINNER WITH ANDRE on three different occasions. On each of them, I have seen 10 to 20 minutes of it, and then found myself waking up, with the film long over. I'm not making a joke here. It has literally put me to sleep, deep sleep, on three separate viewing attempts. I keep hearing from intelligent, discriminating critics like yourself that it is fascinating, and each time it has proved to be the most effective sleep-inducing drug I've ever encountered.

Alfred Hitchcock, in his book-length conversation with Truffaut, spoke of trying to make MOVIES, not "pictures of people talking." MY DINNER WITH ANDRE is the ultimate "picture of people talking," and regardless of how riveting I am repeatedly told their conversation is, I have found it over and over to be as soporific as Hitchcock warned.

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 **Michael Giltz - Huffpost Blogger** *I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz* [permalink](#)



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Well, at least you've found a great tranquilizer for the nights when you have insomnia :) I've sometimes not "gotten" a movie or book that others love and have been willing to give it two or three shots (after a decent interval has passed to let my disinterest/hatred subside). Like any discerning person, you gave an acclaimed film more than a fair shake. (I, for example, dislike most of Godard despite several tries on numerous films.) And now you never have to watch My Dinner With Andre again. Unless, of course, you're having trouble falling asleep. Thanks for mentioning the TCM airing. I forgot to do so.

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 **Tallulah Morehead - Huffpost Blogger** *I'm a Fan of Tallulah Morehead* [permalink](#)



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Understand, I'm not saying MY DINNER WITH ANDRE is a bad or a boring movie. I can't, because I haven't seen most of it. It has truly just rendered me unconscious everytime I've attempted to watch it. I have heard many times that it's great from people whose opinions I respect, but it drops me in my tracks.

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I should add that I've had the reverse experience with Jacques Tati films. I love his four Hulot films, but on a couple occasions I have run one or another of them for friends, only to have them left utterly cold and bored by him.

*Morehead's Profile*

Comedy hardly gets more exquisite than Tati (and bless Criterion for their lovely releases of these films), but they sure bore the hell out of some people.

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