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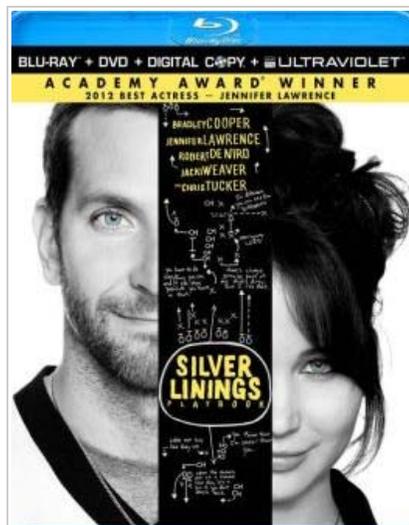
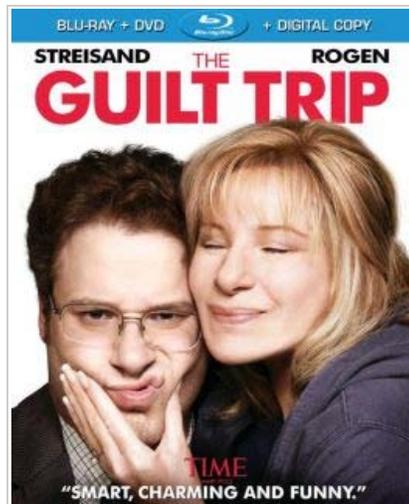
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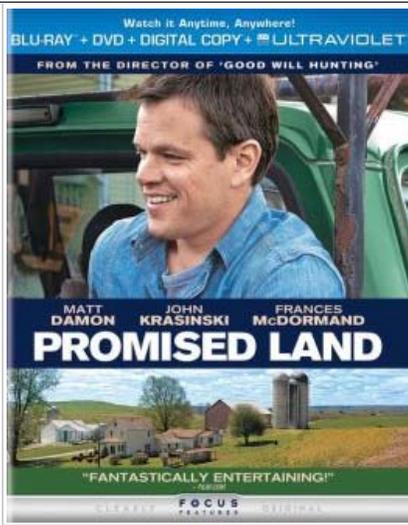
ENTERTAINMENT

DVDs: Fresh *Wuthering Heights*, Classic Bruce Lee, Lame *Lindbergh*

Posted: 05/04/2013 4:20 pm

Lots of titles to catch up on, including a fresh take on *Wuthering Heights*, the last Baz Luhrmann film I really loved, an amusing British comedy about an irascible doctor and the always welcome release of new Criterion titles. Here we go.





WUTHERING HEIGHTS (\$29.99 DVD;

Oscilloscope)

THE GUILT TRIP (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Paramount)

SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Weinstein/Anchor Bay)

PROMISED LAND (\$34.99 BluRay combo; Universal)

THE IMPOSSIBLE (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Summit) -- Emily Bronte's masterpiece

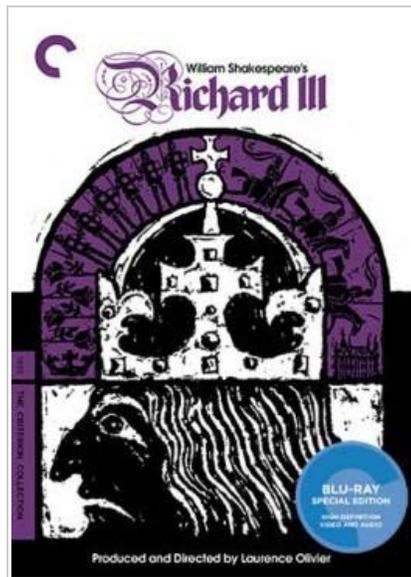
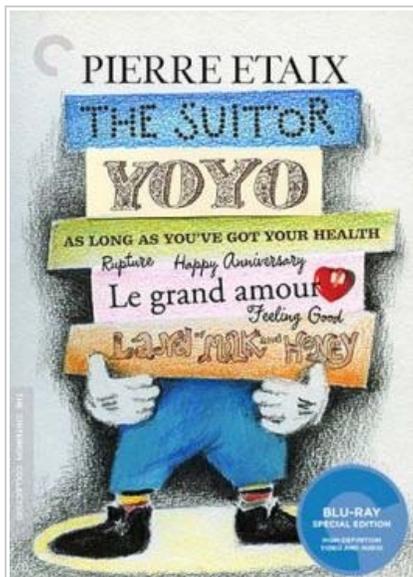
Wuthering Heights has been filmed umpteen times. But like a classic play, it's well worth revisiting again and again. Still, most new versions aren't terribly interesting even though every generation wants to tackle it. Not so here. Director Andrea Arnold has been a technically fascinating talent. Here her formidable skills have been married to a passionate tale, bringing out a richness and humanity in her work not present before. This was one of the most acclaimed films of the year, but was all but overlooked by the general public. Well worth checking out.

Barbra Streisand has made so few films (relatively speaking) that each one feels like an event. And it's disappointing when they're not up to snuff. She's been her own worst enemy over the years, showing a Beatty-like reluctance to commit and overthinking her choices. So I applaud everything about *The Guilt Trip* -- it's loosey-goosey nature, it's comedic nature, taking a chance on young talent -- yes, everything about it except the movie itself. Sigh.

Intellectually, I resisted *Silver Linings Playbook*, a sentimental drama about two misfits falling in love. Too obvious, too determined to move me, too heart-tugging. But the excellent cast (De Niro hasn't been this restrained and good in a long time) won me over. No wonder they were all nominated for Oscars. I'm afraid a second viewing will be one viewing too much for this pleasant little surprise. But for those who didn't catch it, this is a genial movie for adults.

Promised Land should have been Matt Damon's directorial debut. But he backed out and handed the reins to director Gus Van Sant (in pure, mainstream studio mode here). Did Damon sense the movie wouldn't quite fulfill its potential? Hardly, since he produced and co-wrote the script. It may also be just as telling for revealing the ambition and interesting desire of actor John Krasinski (*The Office*) who also co-wrote the script and co-stars. Krasinski seems to be using his modest TV success to make interesting, intelligent films. This story nominally about fracking proves to be truly about people in an interesting, relatively nuanced manner. Excellent cast, including Hal Holbrook as a schoolteacher and Frances McDormand as a love interest.

A big hit overseas, *The Impossible* is a classic type of Hollywood movie that uses a natural disaster to show beautiful movie stars overcoming the odds to survive, surprising no one in the process. Naomi Watts is the glamorous movie star/mother, Ewan McGregor is the glamorous movie star/father and anyone complaining that a big movie about a tsunami focuses on the wealthy white tourists simply doesn't know much about Hollywood disaster epics.



PIERRE ETAIX: THE CRITERION

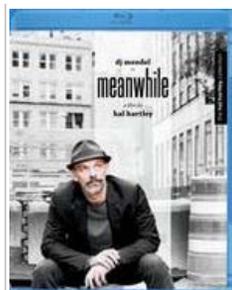
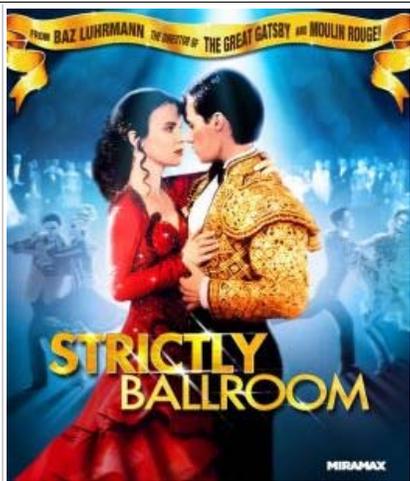
COLLECTION (\$59.99 BluRay; Criterion Collection)

RICHARD III (\$39.99 BluRay; Criterion Collection) -- It's been just about one year since I first even heard the name of French director/actor Pierre Etaix. He labored in obscurity simply because his films weren't being seen. (Legal troubles.) A circus performer besotted with silent films, he created almost all his works in the 1960s firmly in the vein of Jacques Tati. Last year, **Film Forum in NYC** hosted a festival of his works to sold out crowds. They've come back again this year. But for those who don't live nearby (or didn't catch them on TCM recently), Criterion has produced a beautiful boxed set including 2010 restorations of all his major work. You get five feature films -- including his masterpiece *Le Grand Amour* -- three shorts, a documentary about his life and career by Etaix's wife and more. He's still alive, having fled the disastrous pressures of movies after about a decade of brilliance to pursue his muse in the circus (usually, it works the other way around). A unique talent.

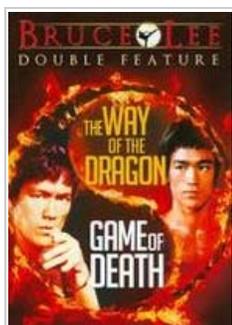
Why I wonder did Laurence Olivier direct so few films? Ignoring a TV movie, he directed one Hollywood trifle (*The Prince And The Showgirl*), co-directed one Chekhov and directed on his own three masterpieces of Shakespeare, each one acclaimed and commercially successful around the world. *Henry V* was a World War II morale booster, *Hamlet* an Oscar triumph and *Richard III* less so, but hardly disastrously so. Interestingly, it was premiered on TV in the U.S. the same day it opened in movie theaters. The TV airing reached tens of millions of people so not surprisingly the theatrical version was a flop. But Olivier was nominated for Best Actor and its reputation has grown since to the point where many would argue it's his best of the three. Yet for the next 34 years of his career, no more Shakespeare and only two more films overall. What a pity. Criterion offers its usual thoughtful, illuminating extras, including a BBC interview of Olivier by Kenneth Tynan, audio commentary by members of the RSC and more.



STRICTLY BALLROOM (\$14.99 BluRay; Miramax/Lionsgate)
FLIRT (\$29.99 BluRay; Olive)
MEANWHILE (\$24.99 BluRay; Olive)
BRUCE LEE DOUBLE FEATURE THE BIG



BOSS/FIST OF FURY (\$14.99 DVD; Shout)
BRUCE LEE DOUBLE FEATURE
THE WAY OF THE DRAGON/GAME OF DEATH (\$14.9

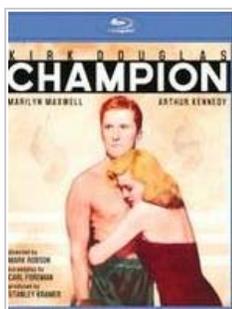


DVD; Shout) -- I still remember working at Premiere magazine when Baz Luhrmann's directorial debut *Strictly Ballroom* was screening. People were buzzing about this charming little Australian film and the possibility it might prove a crowd-pleasing indie hit. I saw the movie and knew exactly what they were talking about. Here was a talent to remember. Unfortunately, it's been downhill ever since, even though

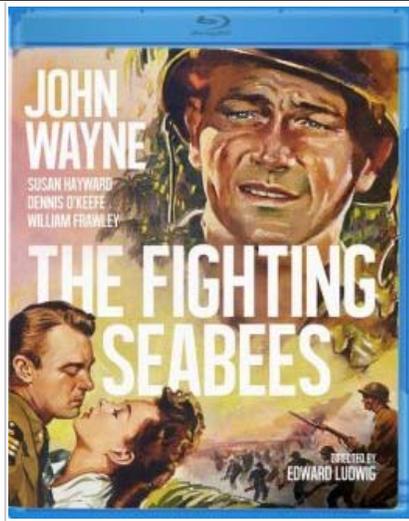
that artistic slide has been showered with box office and Oscar glory. Certainly, *The Great Gatsby* doesn't look promising. So enjoy this amusing trifle about ballroom competition long before *Dancing With The Stars* made that popular again. And wonder what might have been. Or perhaps spot the excesses that seemed marginal here but would soon take center stage.

It's rare to find a directorial talent that seems genuinely fresh and unique but that's exactly what Hal Hartley offered. He thoroughly deserves a string of releases in The Hal Hartley Collection, including his playful *Flirt* (which tells the same story in three different ways) and his relatively unheralded return to form *Meanwhile*. I savor *Trust* and *Simple Men* most of all, but his entire body of work deserves this attention.

Bruce Lee will always be a tantalizing case of what-if since his career was so prematurely shortened. He's both wildly popular and rarely respected, unlike say Jackie Chan who crossed over to worldwide fame and Hollywood success in Lee's wake. Shout Factory offers inexpensive double features that include two of his best, each one on a disc with another, lesser movie. Bargain basement prices for a world class talent.



THE RED PONY (\$29.99 BluRay; Olive/Paramount)
CHAMPION (\$29.99 BluRay; Olive/Paramount)
THE FIGHTING SEABEES (\$29.99 BluRay; Olive/Paramount)
COPACABANA (\$29.99 BluRay; Olive/Paramount) -- Robert Mitchum rarely got a chance to exude warmth (we preferred him stoic and tough) but he did it very well. Here he's a



farmhand who knows more about ponies (and how to treat a little boy) than the kid's own father. Based on three short stories by John Steinbeck, *The Red Pony* is a family film in the best sense of the word with a great, great score by Aaron Copland.

Kirk Douglas hit his stride fast in the movies, with iconic

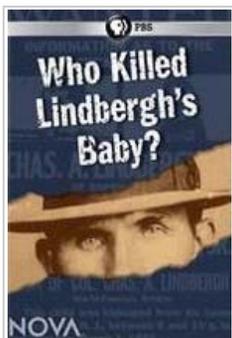
roles in *Out Of The Past*, *Ace In The Hole*, *Detective Story* and *The Bad And The Beautiful* almost overshadowing his key turn in *Champion* as a ruthless boxer determined to make it to the top. The Ring Lardner story it's based on was so cynical that many complained the story's punch was softened. But this cynical drama is no pushover and Douglas received an Oscar nomination for his work.



Maybe half the reason America was convinced it couldn't lose

World War II was movies starring John Wayne. Sure, he was fighting on a sound stage, but you could hardly imagine him doing anything but win. In *The Fighting Seabees*, he's a man overseeing construction who wrangles as much with other military people as with the enemy; the movie tells about the creation of the Seabees in quick, patriotic brushstrokes. Solid entry doing its bit for the war effort.

Copacabana is a backstage comedy about the manager of Carmen Miranda, NOT an adaptation of the Barry Manilow song. But even if it were, star Groucho Marx wouldn't look any more lost. Without his brothers, he looks adrift in the movies. It would take a TV game show to find him a fresh way to display his talents. It certainly ain't here though Marxists will want to take a look.



WHO KILLED LINDBERGH'S BABY (\$24.99 DVD; PBS/Nova)

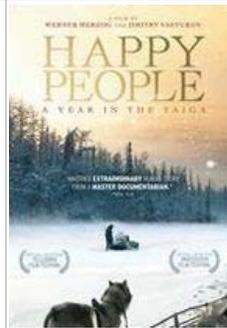
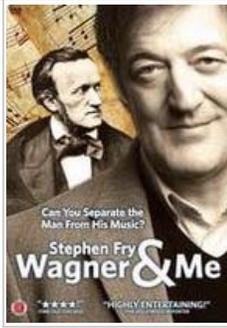
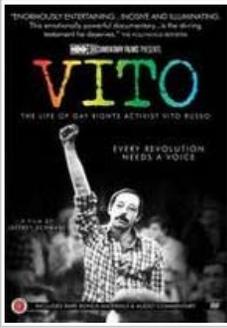
THE CENTRAL PARK FIVE (\$29.99 BluRay; PBS)

VITO (\$27.99 DVD; First Run Features)

WAGNER & ME (\$27.95 DVD; First Run Features)

HAPPY PEOPLE (\$29.99 DVD; Music Box) -- Perhaps it was the Off Broadway musical I saw or the

novel *The Aviator's Wife*. But those recent



endeavors had me at the ready to watch a NOVA special on one of the most famous crimes

in American history, the kidnapping and killing of the Lindbergh baby. But this NOVA special is quite unworthy of PBS. Even for a single episode of an ongoing series, it feels slapdash and cheesy. The "documentary" is filled with half-assed speculation, rumors of rumors and heated suggestions that they might have something to reveal when in fact they don't. It barely rises to the scholarly level of a History Channel special on UFOs. An embarrassment.

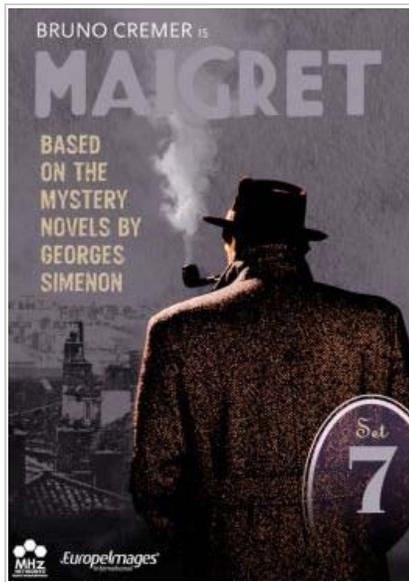
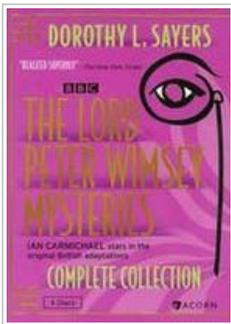
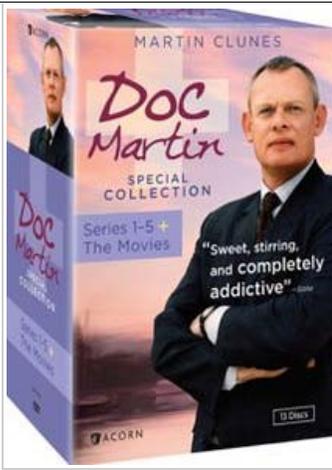
The Ken Burns film *The Central Park Five* is certainly better. Co-directed with David McMahon & Sarah Burns, it has the awful injustice of seeing young men imprisoned for a crime they most clearly did not commit. A miscarriage of justice that the film details nicely. But as a film, there's nothing terribly effective or insightful here. The closer Burns gets to the present, the less certain his instincts prove to be. But if it can bring a sense of closure, it will be worth it.

Vito is a love letter to activist and historian Vito Russo. On the front lines for gay rights in the 1970s, Russo will forever be remembered for his groundbreaking work on *The Celluloid Closet*, which hilariously and effectively illuminated the way gays had been depicted by Hollywood. Anyone who hasn't read that book or seen the film based on it, should start there. Those who want to learn more about Russo will find plenty to savor here.

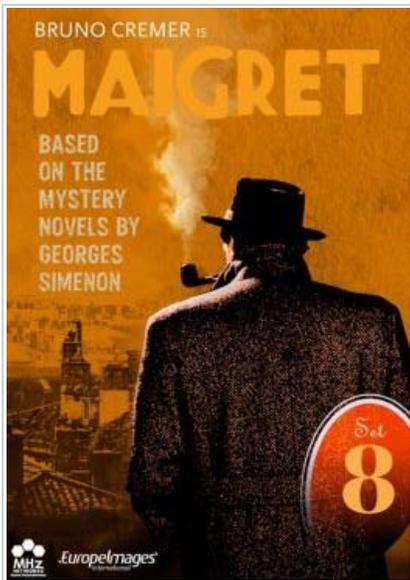
Stephen Fry is a delightful companion on any subject. But this trifle tossed off for UK television will certainly prove more effective on DVD than it was as a theatrical release, which is more than this modest idea deserved. *Wagner & Me* is simply Fry agonizing over the fact that he loves the music of Wagner but feels guilty since Wagner was such a bastard and had been embraced, even co-opted by Hitler. If one gets the sneaking suspicion that Fry agreed to this simply as an excuse to travel to Bayreuth and visit the temple of Wagner located there, well frankly that just makes me like him more. Strictly for Wagner fanatics.

Werner Herzog continues to deliver one fascinating, unexpected documentary after another. This one -- co-directed with Dmitry Vasyukov -- heads deep into Siberia to find a village of some 300 people. Only accessible by helicopter or boat, the Taiga people live much as they have for centuries. *Happy People* follows their lives for a year, with Herzog's typically eccentric narration helping to avoid the mythologizing of "happy primitives" at least somewhat.

**DOC
MARTIN**



COLLECTION SERIES 1-5 AND THE MOVIES (\$124.99 DVD; Acorn)
MAVERICK COMPLETE SECOND SEASON (\$39.99 DVD; Warner Bros.)
THE LORD PETER WIMSEY MYSTERIES (\$59.99 DVD; Acorn)
MAIGRET SET 7 AND 8 (\$59.99 each on DVD; MHZ Networks)
MR. SELFRIDGE (\$54.99 BluRay; PBS)



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 I've seen
Doc

Martin out of the corner of my eye for a number of years but finally caught up with it in this collection. (The show is still ongoing and a new season returns this fall.) It's a genial, hour-long comedy about a high-powered London surgeon who develops a sudden horror of blood that sends him to the small, seaside town of Portwenn where his aunt lives. He's stuck as a GP surrounded by eccentric locals who don't enjoy his abrasive bedside manner.

Martin Clunes is very good as the doctor and now that I'm into season two, you can see the show quietly improving (they dumped one very irritating minor character and tightened the storylines). It's amiable comfort food of the Northern Exposure variety, though less oddball than that classic.

Was there ever any doubt James Garner would be a big star? I doubt it. I grew up with *The Rockford Files* so it's fun for me to discover how similar Jim Rockford is to Maverick, a card sharp who would much prefer to slip quietly out of town rather than engage in a gun fight. Garner is all charm here in this quirky, offbeat Western that must have seemed like a fresh delight compared to all the sober westerns surrounding it on TV at the time. Bizarrely, because it took so long to film an episode, they brought in another actor to play his brother so production could continue apace. Bart was never as interesting as Bret (even though they were essentially the same character). It's tempting to skip over Bart's episodes and just watch Bret's though the most fun is when they appear together.

The Lord Peter Wimsey Complete Collection contains the Ian Carmichael take on the genial British sleuth. You get five complete mysteries, with each book taken at a leisurely pace for 16 hours of entertainment in all. If you've never read the Dorothy L. Sayers books they're based on, you're in for an even better treat when you read them. It's hard not to miss Harriet Walter as his love interest Harriet Vine from the 1980s adaptation, but it's genial stuff nonetheless.

I'm just getting used to the great Michael Gambon in the UK take on Georges Simenon's detective Maigret and here comes Sets 7 and 8 of the far more authentic *Maigret* done in French and starring Bruno Cremer as the reserved, patient crime solver. Each set contains six feature length films. Cremer played Maigret from 1991 to 2005, in 54 adventures in all and is certainly one of the most popular takes on Maigret. Kudos to MHZ for bringing out this and many other TV shows not in English, shows that are rarely seen in the US at all.

Some actors simply don't work in period films. They're simply too "contemporary" somehow. That may be the central problem with Jeremy Piven as the lead in *Mr. Selfridge*, the story of an American coming to London and revolutionizing the retail industry. Still, it's not the only one with stories a little more soapish when the unusual story might have proven fascinating all on its own without the trappings of episodic television.

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