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When I'm out of the country for the month of May, I come back to a massive pile of mail containing books, CDs and DVDs. Yes, it's like Christmas morning and the presents I look forward to the most come from Criterion. I've been buying and reviewing their releases from CD-ROM to laser disc to DVD and now BluRay. If it's a movie I know, they present it with such care and attention to detail, I learn something new. If it's a movie I don't know, I realize I should. Here are the titles I've been catching up on during the past few weeks.

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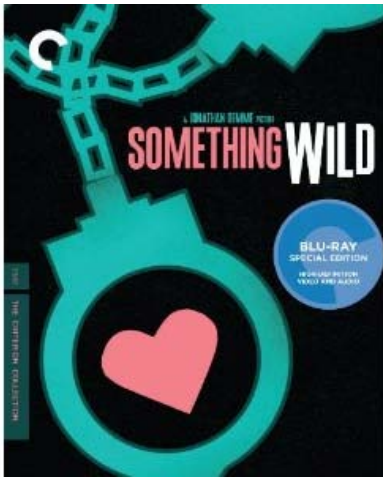


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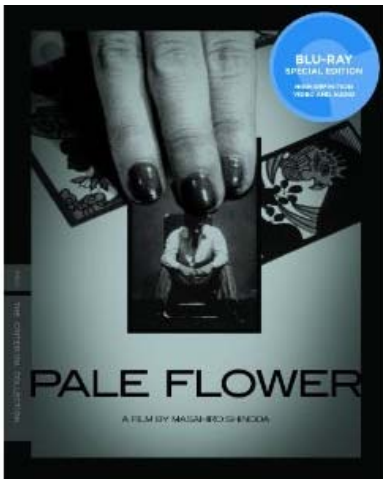
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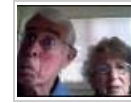
SOMETHING WILD (\$39.95 BluRay or \$29.95 regular; Criterion) -- I'll always have a soft spot for director Jonathan Demme. He was the first film critic at my college newspaper, **The Independent Florida Alligator**, which serves the University of Florida. He walked in and created the job. I got to do it when I worked at the paper during my seven years of school. Then his brilliant concert film *Stop Making Sense* was the very first movie I saw at a screening. The local theater chain got a print in advance. So instead of seeing the movie when it opened and running my review a week later, I went to the theater in the morning and sat in a giant, one screen palace all by myself and watched this movie in a daze. If only every film I screened were that good. And then there's *Something Wild*, a tricky little movie that seesaws back and forth between light comedy and genuine violence as affable Jeff Daniels gets swept into a world of hurt by the kooky siren played by Melanie Griffith. The movie remains an offbeat delight but what I loved here were the extras. Demme speaks about the movie with such enthusiasm and affection, sharing credit among his collaborators with genuine delight, that it's clear this movie is very special to him. I never do it, but I'm always tempted to do what the Jeff Daniels character does and address waiters and waitresses by the name on their tags. Hey, it's what they're there for, he says.



PALE FLOWER (\$39.95 BluRay or \$29.95 regular; Criterion) -- Here's a film I'd never heard of, but since Criterion was making it part of their canon, I knew it would be worth my time. Indeed. This Japanese gangster noir is an absolute treat. Ryo Ikebe is a gangster just out of prison for killing a man. He's got an old flame but she doesn't interest him nearly as much as the stunningly beautiful Saeko (Mariko Kaga). They're kindred spirits bored with life who while away the day gambling at cards for higher and higher stakes. She rarely expresses any emotion unless danger is nigh: during a raid on their gambling den she giggles madly and late at night on the road she gets into a game of chicken with another fast-moving car and bursts out in joy. They're drawn to each other but too filled with ennui to do much of anything about it. Existential gangster flick? Avant garde experiment with an exceptionally vivid and unusual score by Toru Takemitsu? A classic noir via Camus? All that and more. Great subversive fun.

BLOW OUT (\$29.95; Criterion) -- I don't think you can make the argument anymore that Brian De Palma is an important filmmaker. But if you were going to, you'd certainly include this 1981 remake of *Blow-Up*. Instead of a photographer, John Travolta plays a sound effects guy who thinks he may have captured evidence of a political assassination. It's like Coppola's *The Conversation* merged with the paranoia of the era and De Palma shows his usual restraint by throwing in every trick in the book to tell

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the story. But since it's not in his usual Hitchcock vein, the tricks feel fresher and Travolta and costar Nancy Allen are in top form. Extras include director Noah Baumbach talking with De Palma.

SMILES OF A SUMMER NIGHT (\$39.95 BluRay or \$29.95 regular; Criterion) -- It amazes me that people think of director Ingmar Bergman as dour and humorless. Many of his best films came long before the chill set in. Besides, even *The Seventh Seal* reveals itself as intentionally witty when you see it with an audience. Surely no one who saw *Wild Strawberries* or *Fanny & Alexander* would imagine Bergman as despairing and bleak. His breakthrough *Smiles Of A Summer Night* is another example, capturing eight people romantically entangled during a weekend in the country. It inspired both Woody Allen's *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* and Stephen Sondheim's near perfect *A Little Night Music*. Sexy and funny, it will forever banish your misconceptions about this major director.

KES (\$39.95 BluRay or \$29.95 regular; Criterion) -- Ken Loach's theatrical landmark *Kes* is a coming of age tale that shows the son of a miner trapped in a dead-end world who gets an escape of sorts through his bond with a wild bird. This 1970 movie was named as one of the ten best British films of the century by the British Film Institute and no wonder. Rarely has Loach's fiery denunciation of social injustice been so perfectly and invisibly married to a story so universal in its reach. The "extras" -- the word hardly does them justice -- include a Loach profile on TV's *Southbank* show from 1993, a new documentary about the making of the film and his landmark feature *Cathy Come Home*, a massively popular TV movie as worthy of attention on its own as anything Loach has done.

FAT GIRL (\$39.95 BluRay or \$29.95 regular; Criterion) -- I've always believed *Fat Girl* is better than the feminist politics (rightly) ascribed to it. Few movies capture female adolescence and sexuality as well as this one, the story of two sisters (one fat, one thin and pretty) stuck in a boring town over the summer. Director Catherine Breillat has recaptured her mojo recently with movies retelling fairy tales like *Snow White*. So perhaps that will bring new attention to this shocking, frank film starring Roxane Mesquida. Two interesting interviews with Breillat, one the day after the film's world premiere and the other a look back at its making.

SWEETIE (\$39.95 BluRay or \$29.95 regular; Criterion) -- Another important director, Jane Campion has never recovered from pouring her all into the masterpiece *The Piano*. But before that film apparently exhausted her creatively, Campion delivered terrific movies like *An Angel At My Table* and her feature debut *Sweetie*, another look at two very different sisters. Released in 1989, it's a landmark in Australian cinema. Among the usual extras are a treat: three short films Campion made before her feature debut.

THE MAKIOKA SISTERS (\$39.95 BluRay or \$29.95 regular; Criterion)

ECLIPSE SERIES 26: SILENT NARUSE (\$44.95; Eclipse from Criterion) -- Film Forum had a big success recently with a series devoted to Japanese divas. Among the features included was director Kon Ichikawa's gorgeous 1983 film *The Makioka Sisters*, about four sisters who take over their dad's kimono business right before World War II. Film Forum simply won't show a movie unless they can get an acceptable print or in this case a new one with new subtitling. If you couldn't make it, this BluRay is an eye-popping edition that will do the film justice. And who but Criterion -- through their "nothing but the movies" line Eclipse -- would take the time to release silent films by director Mikio Naruse? He made two dozen silents until he segued into sound, but only five of them are known to still exist. Eclipse presents them all, including such seminal Naruse as the story of an aging geisha despised by her son (think *Mildred Pierce*) as well as the tale of a waitress who becomes trapped in a loveless marriage.

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the co-host of Showbiz Sandbox, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his website and his daily blog. Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called Popsurfing and also available for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

NOTE: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs to consider for review. He typically does not guarantee coverage and invariably receives far more screeners and DVDs than he can cover each week. Also, Michael Giltz freelances as a writer of DVD copy (the text that appears on the back of DVDs) for some titles released by IFC and other subsidiaries of MPI. It helps pay the rent, but does not obligate him in any way to speak positively about their titles.

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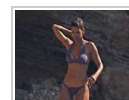


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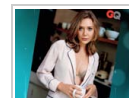
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