

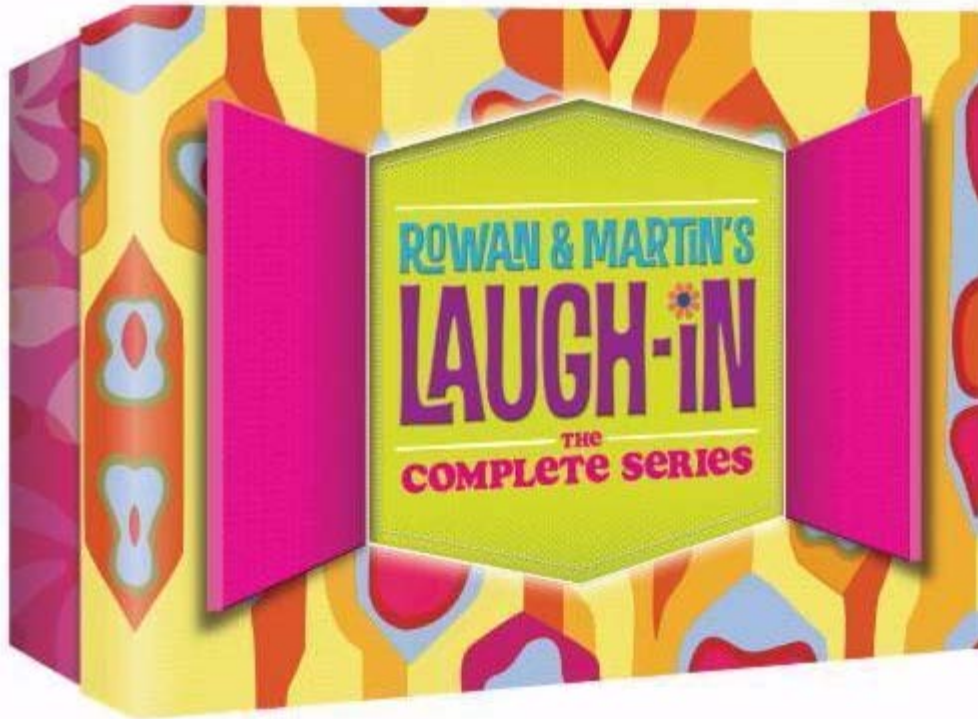


Michael Giltz, ContributorBookFilter creator

DVDs: "Laugh-In" Socks It To Us, Peter Sellers in the "Pink," & Disney's Greatest Animated Film

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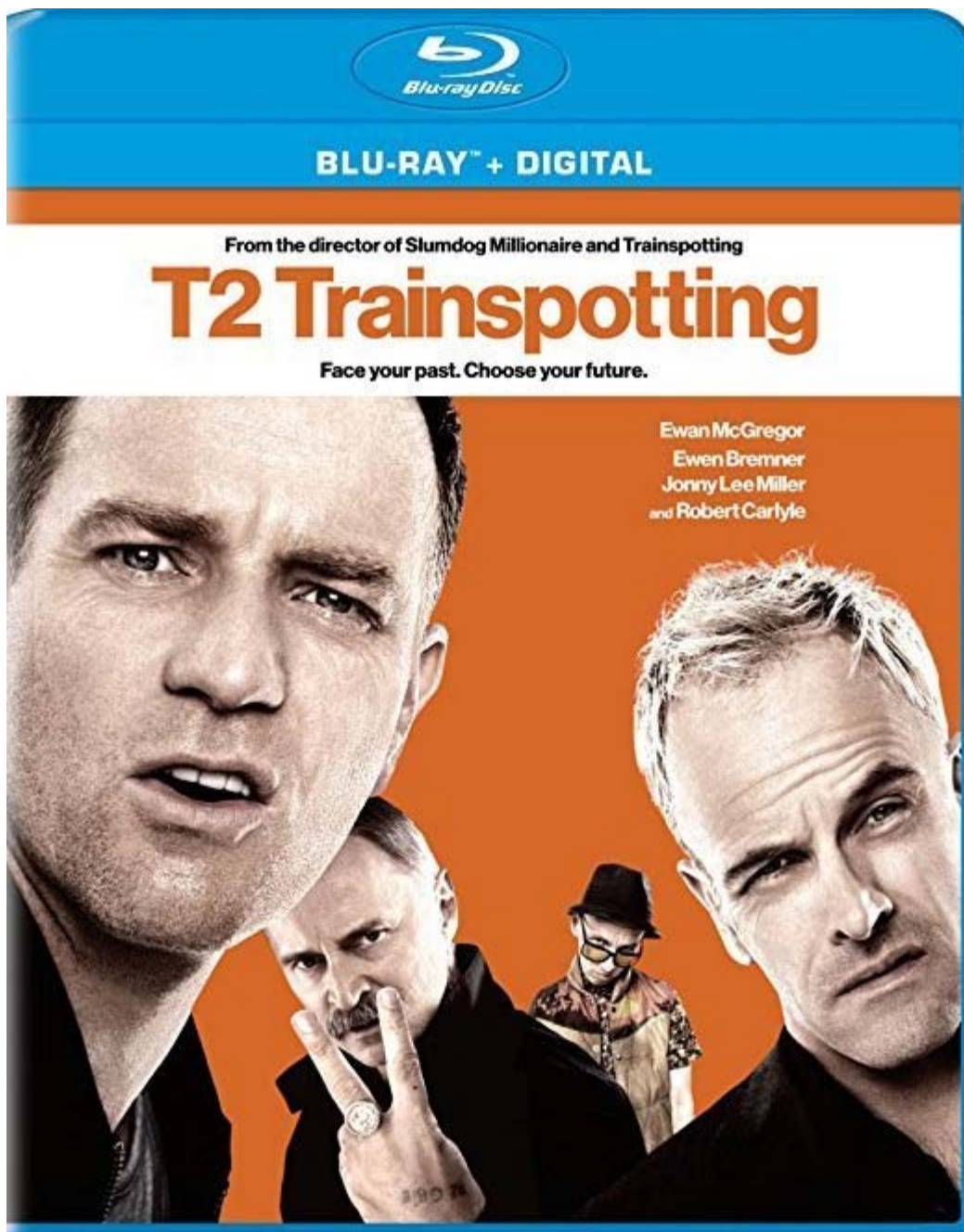
DVD and BluRay releases have slowed down with the heat of summer. And yet, we have a lavish boxed set devoted to the *SNL* precursor *Laugh-In*, a welcome new edition of the complete *Pink Panther* comedies, a very unnecessary sequel to the seminal movie *Trainspotting* and what may be Disney's greatest animated film.



ROWAN & MARTIN'S LAUGH-IN: THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$249.95 DVD; TimeLife)

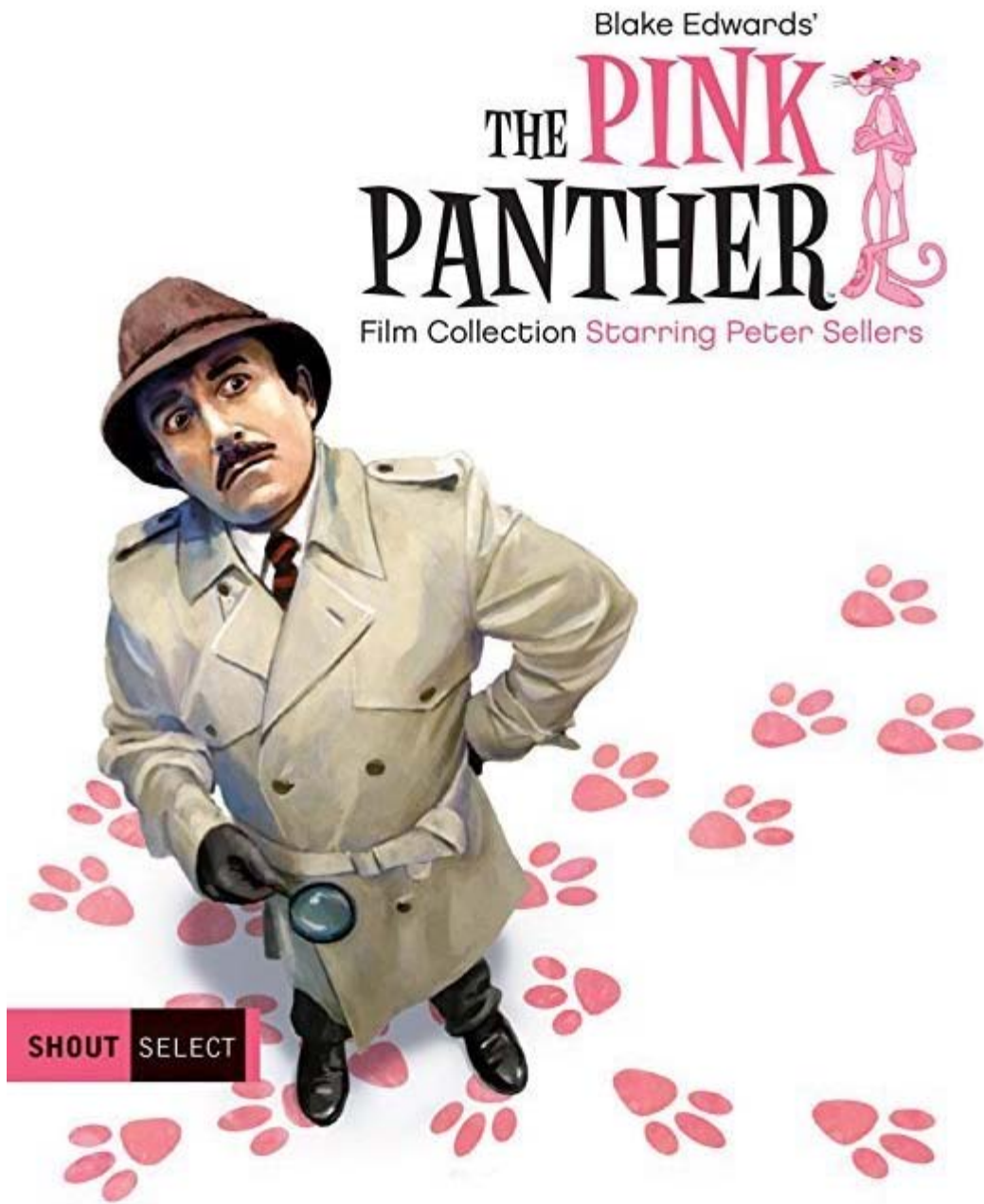
I rarely review/discuss releases that are exclusive to one outlet or store and not widely available. Still, a complete boxed set of one of the landmark variety shows in TV history is too juicy to pass up. For now, it's only available at TimeLife, but if previous exclusives are any indication, it will eventually be available at other websites and stores down the road if you want to wait. Thanks to music rights (and the fact that they often

produced a gazillion hours of TV), most shows like this are not available in complete sets. Not Ed Sullivan's variety show, not the parade of 1970s squeaky clean variety shows and certainly not this time capsule of a series. You get a massive 140 episodes on 38 DVDs and loads of worthy extras. *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* began on September 9, 1967 — some fifty years ago — as a one-off special and was such a hit it became a full series a few months later. How is it? Well, needless to say I haven't watched it all. But skipping around — and given the frantic, mod editing one can hardly tell if you're doing it — this is timeless, dated, funny, dull, hip and square. Amusingly, some remember it as clean wholesome entertainment and surely that's how any kids watching today will see it. But like the vaudeville it was echoing, the show is filled with sexual innuendoes that dad can chuckle at while the children wait for the silly bits. You'll find plenty of timely political humor but the real gems are the sketches that focus on recurring characters, the sort of stuff enlivened by talents like Lily Tomlin, Flip Wilson and the endearingly goofy Goldie Hawn. (She saw her dumb blonde act was clicking and ran with it; who can blame her?) One does feel a little queasy about watching Richard Nixon coming on the show and playing the good sport by repeating the catch phrase "Sock it to me." You'd think we'd learn to not humanize politicians in this way but apparently Lorne Michaels never got the memo. Extras include bloopers and a previous cast reunion from 25 years ago. (How time flies.) Old-fashioned and innovative, you'll find everything from early music videos to Sammy Davis Jr. intoning, "Here come de judge!" In other words, pretty much anything and everything.



T2 TRAINSPOTTING (\$30.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

God knows why Irvine Welsh felt the need to write the novel, a sequel to his most famous (but far from his only significant) work. God knows why director Danny Boyle would feel the need to dive back in. God knows other than being good sports why actors like Ewan McGregor and Jonny Lee Miller would show up. And sure, we love to make fun of quotes like F. Scott Fitzgerald's "There are no second acts in American lives" and Thomas Wolfe's "You can't go home again." But in fact, usually you really can't go home again, even if sometimes you can. And when you try, it won't necessarily be a train wreck of epic proportions, a "what was I thinking" nightmare. It will usually just be...awkward and pointless, with everything a little smaller and less meaningful than you expected. How are those lovable drug addicts and down-and-outers? Well, still alive but otherwise catching up doesn't take long and isn't very interesting.



BLAKE EDWARDS' THE PINK PANTHER FILM COLLECTION (\$99.99 BluRay; Shout! Factory)

In baseball, batting .500 is a Hall of Fame career. So while we must readily admit that the last three Pink Panther movies are tiresome to embarrassing, the first three are silly to sublime. We're talking here about the six films (mostly) starring Peter Sellers as the bumbling Inspector Clouseau. (You can't write the name "Inspector Clouseau" without stumbling in front of it, much as Pope John Paul II was always referred to reflexively as "the much-travelled Pontiff.") Sellers is indeed the patron saint of smart-silly comics, able to be absolutely goofy and brilliantly witty at the same time, a man as comfortable with the spit-take as with a quiet stillness that could elicit laughs too. We are ignoring the Alan Arkin elbowing in via Inspector Clouseau, as well as Roger Moore's game attempt to carry the torch, Roberto Benigni's lame attempt to carry the torch (all of

the bumbling and none of the brains) and Steve Martin's fine but not inspired update. We are discussing director Blake Edwards and Peter Sellers in *The Pink Panther*, their masterpiece *A Shot In The Dark*, the very silly but delightful *The Return Of The Pink Panther* and the three lesser efforts, *The Pink Panther Strikes Again*, *Revenge Of the Pink Panther* and *Trail Of The Pink Panther*, in which the late Sellers is propped up like *Weekend At Bernie's* and they use outtakes from previous films in order to make one final film with Sellers as Clouseau even though that meant they spent most of the movie shooting around the awkward fact that their star was dead and unavailable. (Sellers might have laughed uproariously if he'd seen it.) The first is very dry, almost unaware of how amusing it would prove. *A Shot In The Dark* is dry like a martini, balancing perfectly between the droll amusement of the first and the slapstick of the third. Indeed, the third tilts a little towards kids. (I saw it approximately 10,000 times on HBO during that channel's early days.) But it has the courage of its convictions and you may roll your eyes at the "easy" Borscht Belt (or is that Blackpool?). Yet no one could sell 'em like Sellers. All six films are brimming with extras, at least one new one for each film. And the best of the lot — *A Shot In The Dark* — looks terrific in a new transfer. You may stop watching after the third but don't be surprised if the kids keep going.





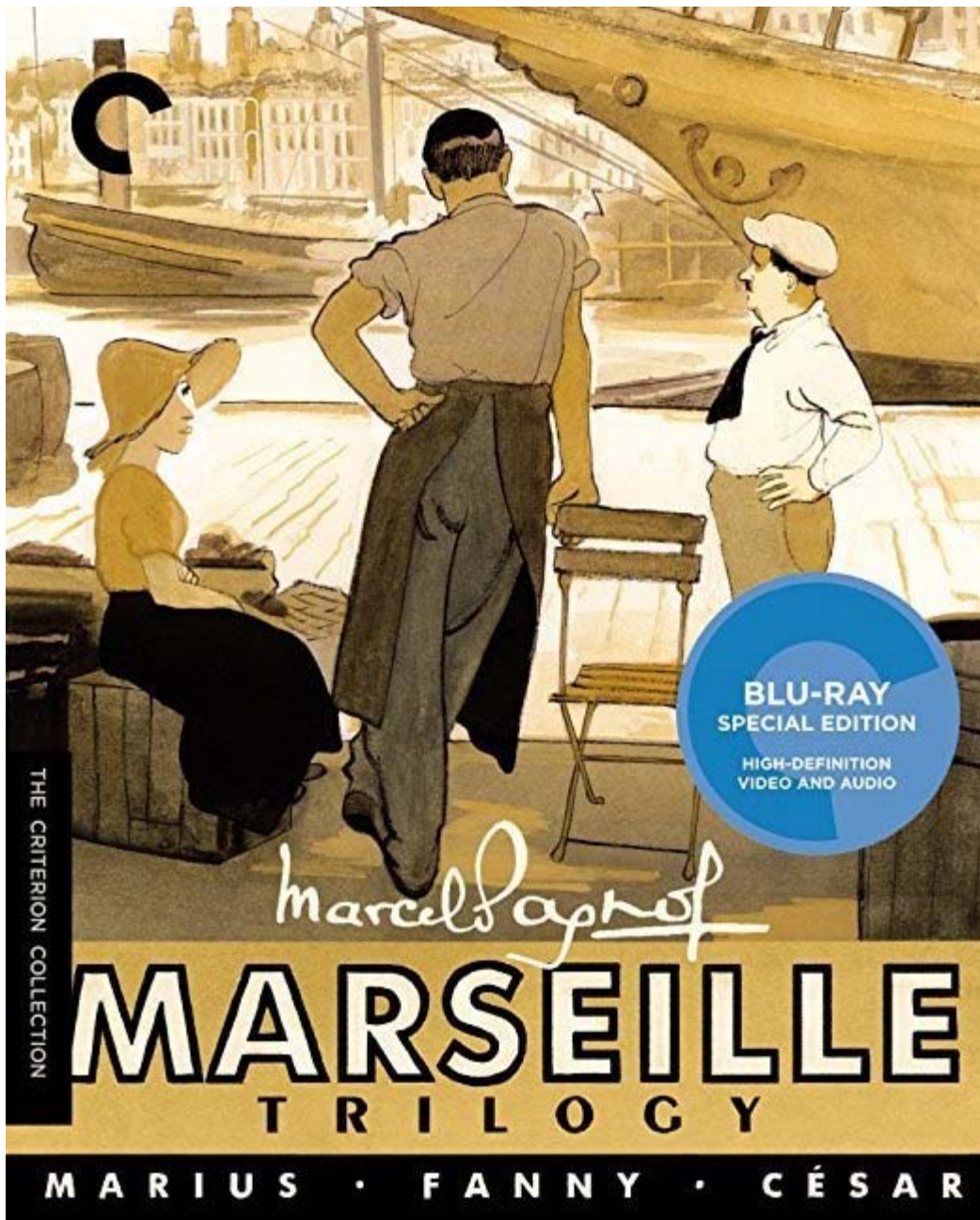
SIMPLE MINDS ACOUSTIC IN CONCERT (\$19.99 DVD/CD; Eagle Vision)

CAR WASH (\$27.99 BluRay; Shout! Factory)

They were going to be bigger than U2. Their biggest worldwide hit was a fluke from a film for teenagers dubbed “The Little Chill” (the John Hughes classic *The Breakfast Club*). And like all good bands — and great live acts — they have endured. This DVD/CD set is a celebration of the Scottish act’s serious live chops. You might have seen them in their heyday in stadiums, which they could fill and hold, a feat few acts can pull off. But if you were lucky enough in more recent years, you saw their intensity and power in a smaller setting. I’ve always preferred the slightly more off-kilter, artier music of *Sparkle In The Rain* and *New Gold Dream* to the Big Sound that made them a household name via “(Don’t You) Forget About Me.” (And how telling and diffident

are those parentheses?) But they're consistently good all the way through and on this live concert and album you can hear them reimagine their best songs in an acoustic setting. Sure, it's Simple Minds unplugged (cliche!), but Jim Kerr and the gang make this more than an exercise in nostalgia. If you're like me, one listen and you'll start listening again to those albums, catching up on the ones you missed and making a note to buy a ticket to their show the next time they're in town.

Car Wash isn't exactly a musical and has no real reason for being paired with a Simple Minds concert. But darned if this 1970s comedy doesn't *feel* like a musical. God knows I can't hear its name without having the title tune come blasting through my mind. It's a sneakily interesting little movie, presented as a broad comedy but playing like a French art film that doesn't try and do too much but somehow casually captures an entire world, not to mention some class and race conflict when it comes to the us vs them dynamic of the workers versus the owner. Richard Pryor stops by as do a cast of other colorful characters, but the focus is on the dreamers and drifters with dead-end jobs and not much more to hope for than a paycheck and a little fun at the end of the week before it all starts over again. I always thought it was a commercial hit and inspired a string of similar, slice of life urban comedies. Nope, it got poor reviews (except for Roger Ebert, who compared it to *MASH*) and did so-so at the box office. But what a cast (Ivan Dixon, Bill Duke, George Carlin, Danny DeVito), plus a proud gay black character and a dour, but very satisfying ending.



BLU-RAY
SPECIAL EDITION

HIGH-DEFINITION
VIDEO AND AUDIO

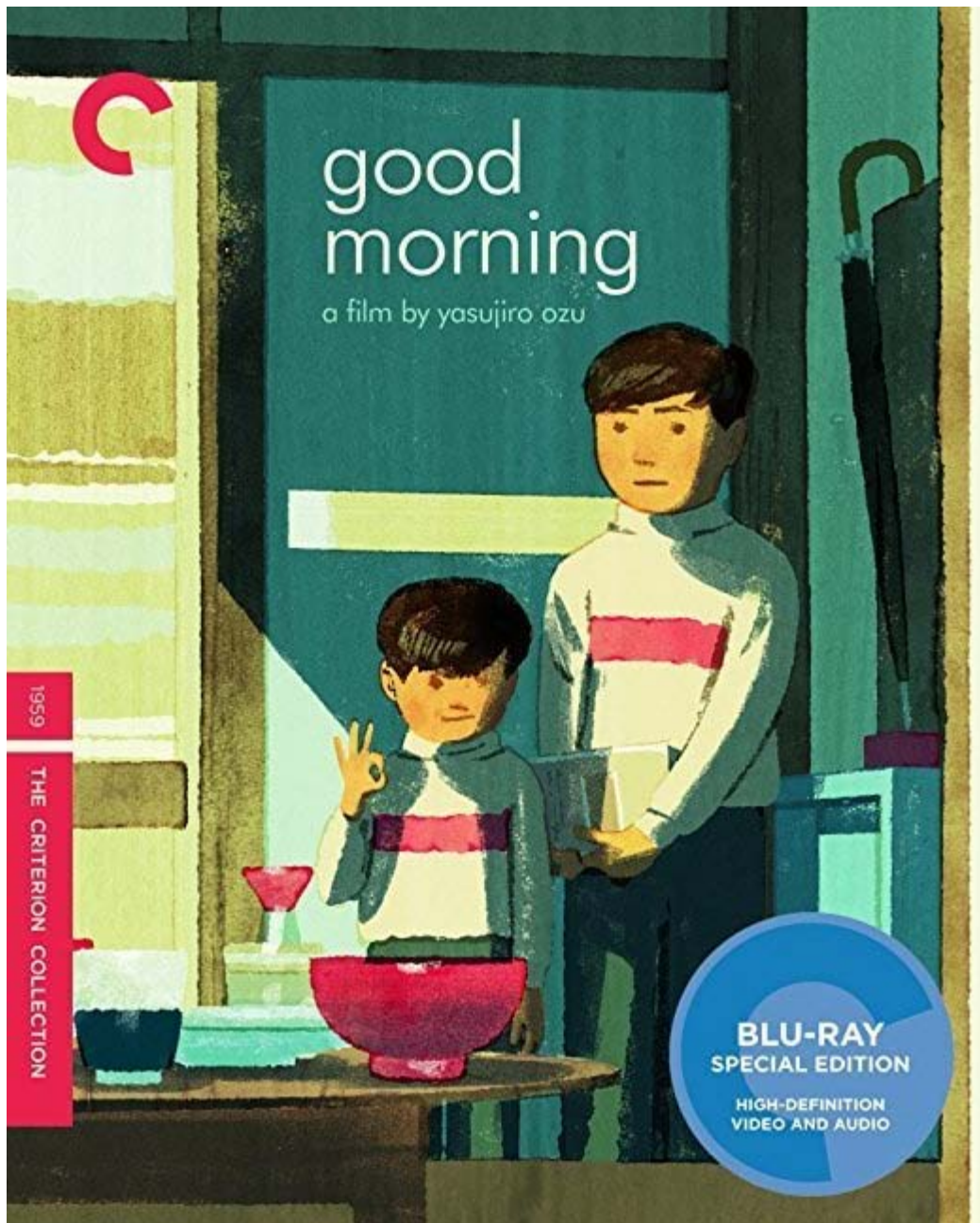
THE CRITERION COLLECTION

marcel l'herbier

MARSEILLE

TRILOGY

MARIUS · FANNY · CÉSAR



MARSEILLE TRILOGY (\$99.95 BluRay; Criterion)

GOOD MORNING (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

It remains one of the great mysteries of cinema while director Marcel Pagnol's charming and heartbreaking love triangle spanning generations and known as the Marseilles Trilogy is not more highly ranked. Is it because they're early sound films and fall in between the silent and sound era? Is it because they're three films and best appreciated as a whole? Is it because they're simply not seen that often in good prints. Perhaps Criterion's loving presentation will help change this sad state. *Marius*, *Fanny* and *Cesar* are the three films, with the first focusing on the owner of a seaside bar, the second on the love of his life (a woman pined after hopelessly by an old sailmaker) and the third on Marius's son who longs to head to sea himself. All three look as good as ever in glorious new prints and the talent on display is overwhelming. Pagnol succeeded as an

artist in every way, as a memoirist, a novelist, a playwright and a filmmaker. Indeed, he financed his movies, wrote and directed them and invariably had the pick of the best French actors around. Labors of love in every respect, you'll find archival and new extras, including a new introduction by director Bertrand Tavernier extolling the greatness of Pagnol. Watch the films first and you'll simply say, "Of course!"

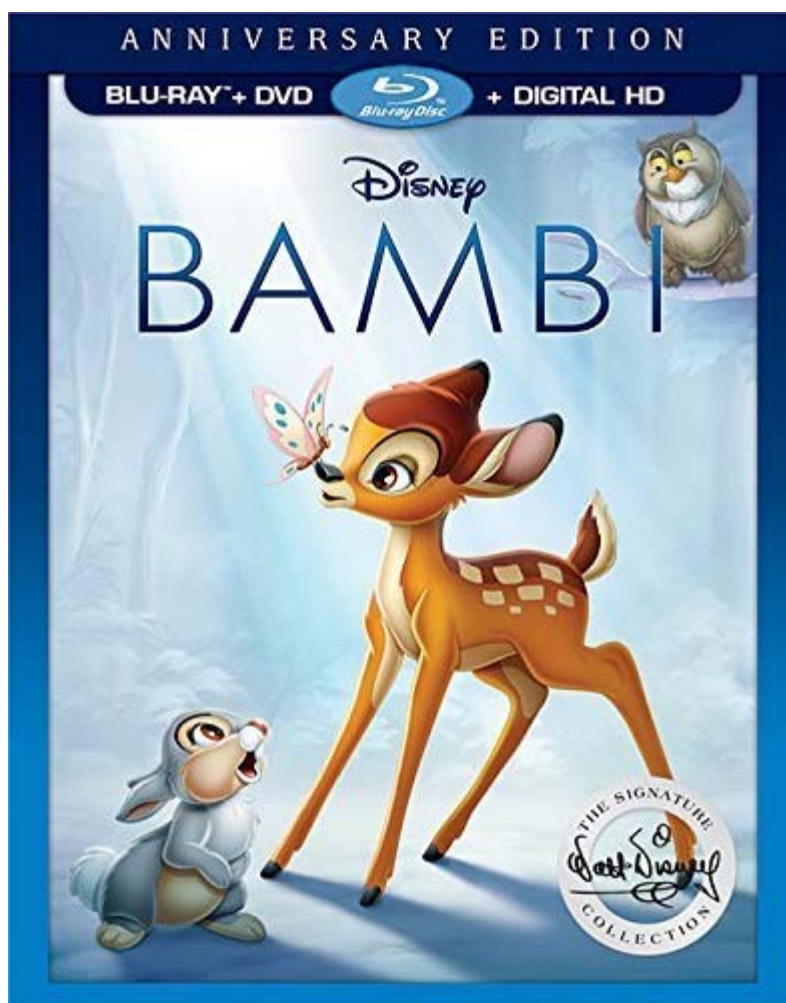
In contrast, the stock of world-class director Yasujiro Ozu has been rising and rising as more and more of his films become widely seen in the West. Whenever a Westerner would mention Akira Kurosawa, a Japanese cineaste would poo-poo and say he's too Western and the *real* Japanese master was Ozu. Well, they're both tremendous talents but they were right to push Ozu forward. In *Good Morning* we have a remake of his silent gem *I Was Born, But...* from 1932, which I saw a few years ago and is here presented as an extra. That's a hell of an extra since it's a delight on its own. This 1959 version involves two boys who go on a strike of not talking when their parents refuse to buy a television set. (The horror!) It's sweet, amusing and a little devastating when the real world intrudes on this quiet little comedy.



POWER RANGERS (\$39.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

Well, the blurb on the cover of this reboot says it's "The first great blockbuster of the year" which is wrong

about everything except “year.” Nonetheless, the original TV show was rather bizarrely popular but not that good. So unlike the travesty that was the recent reboot of *Fantastic Four*, this film is merely forgettable instead of bad. The modest lesbian awakening for one of the Rangers is welcome and handled so discreetly that most kids may not even quite realize it’s happening. Another bonus: a hero on the autism spectrum! It falls between the stools, neither as campily goofy as the TV show nor as full-on mature as most super hero action films are (in comparison of course, since super hero movies not named *Batman* tend to be pretty immature by nature). It’s just bleh, but since merchandise sells spiked there might be a sequel after all and yet another chance to get it right...or at least have them a Blue Power Ranger come out as gay on film and not just the actor (David Yost) who played him on TV.



BAMBI SIGNATURE COLLECTION (\$24.96 BluRay; Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment)

So what do you think is the greatest animated film in Disney history? (Let’s ignore Pixar for this debate.) Their first was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, still an amazingly beautiful work of hand-drawn animation but with two very boring romantic leads. The modern breakthrough was *The Little Mermaid* and the high-water mark was *Beauty and the Beast*, surely Disney’s greatest musical and a good bet for best of all. Still, many cineastes might pick *Pinocchio*, which is simply gorgeous to look at and rich in character and theme. But I’m

going with *Bambi*. The recent “live action” special effects flick *The Jungle Book* notwithstanding, *Bambi* was a story that for many years could only be told via animation. It is easily as beautiful as any film ever made and looks just stunning in this presentation. It has a simplicity of story that captures your heart (it just...happens), features great humor and great tragedy and feels as full and satisfying as any opera or novel or any other work of art you can name. Sure, it'll make the kids weep, but they'll also smile and laugh and feel and care. From first to last, it's as perfect as a film can be, achieving exactly what it wants with elegance and intelligence and charm to spare. Oh and the Austrian novel by Felix Salten that it's based on? *Bambi — A Life In The Woods?* It's even better. No wonder hunters keep the film and the book away from their children.

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