

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Crossroads (\$29.99; Paramount)



SPEARS

Sometimes bad movies can be just what you want. I had a great time watching *Crossroads*, in which the virginal Britney Spears goes on a road trip with her childhood friends right after high school graduation. One of them wants to compete in a rock 'n roll talent contest, though her blossoming pregnancy might be a barrier (unless it's a punk band). Besides, the girl can't really sing and it's Britney who spends all her time writing "poetry" in a little notebook she carries around. The audience laughed when a hunky boyfriend asked if he could look at her notebook and set her words to music, thereby creating Britney's then-current hit single "I'm Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman." What were they expecting? I would have been shocked if that scene hadn't happened. The movie also has one of the most over-the-top melodramatic climaxes not seen since the heyday of the women's film in the '40s. By the way, she's actually not that bad an actress.

The Women (\$19.98; Warner Bros.)

Speaking of "women's films," this isn't one of them. Sure, the tag line boasts "It's All About Men!" to reassure the male audience they shouldn't stay away. But what's the problem? No one enjoys a cat fight more than guys and this George Cukor classic is filled with enough razor sharp one-liners — and even one knock-down tussle — to keep everyone happy. There's not a guy in sight while Rosalind Russell, Norma Shearer and Joan Crawford marry and divorce and get their hair done and stab each other in the back with malicious glee. Surely it's the only film outside of pornography to feature literally an all-female cast. The only problem is that Shearer is such a wet noodle you can't help sort of rooting for the nasty Joan Crawford.

Time Machine (\$26.99; Universal)

After *L.A. Confidential*, Russell Crowe exploded into a major superstar, snagging one important role after enough. The equally compelling Guy Pearce took his own sweet time, finally delivering his first major role in an offbeat independent film . . . called *Memento*. So there was method to his madness. But Pearce's taste in mainstream movies isn't nearly as canny as Crowe's. He's since starred in a dull remake of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and this distastefully silly remake of *Time Machine*. He cuts a dashing figure, so there's no reason Pearce couldn't be an action star, I suppose. Pearce should scurry back to smart, independent moviemaking before what little box office pull he has left is squandered.

Comic Book Confidential (\$19.95)/Twist/ Poetry in Motion (\$29.95 each; Home Vision Entertainment)

Anyone making a career out of documentary filmmaking is a noble figure. But unlike the always-noble Ken Burns or the intellectual's darling Errol Morris, director Ron Mann delights in entertaining, mainstream documentaries that are smart but broadly appealing. *Comic Book Confidential* from '89 is a solid look at the likes of *Spiderman*, *Mad* magazine and graphic novels like *Maus* and *American Splendor*. It's a geek-fest for fans, not a way in for the uninitiated. (Those new to the genre should stick with the bizarrely compelling *Crumb*.) *Twist* is a gas, though I doubt the dance craze is quite the earth-shattering force for social change the movie cheekily suggests. And the 1982 *Poetry in Motion* documents more than 70 poets like Bukowski and Burroughs and Tom Waits at a hipster's love fest.

The Great Mouse Detective/Tarzan & Jane (\$29.99; Disney)

Walt Disney did such a great job putting his stamp on animated movies that we usually give him credit even for films made after the old fella was cryogenically frozen. So pause for a moment and give due praise to director Ron Clements. Disney's turnaround came about thanks to animated movies, led by the passion of studio chief Jeffrey Katzenberg. And some would date the beginning of that to *The Fox and the Hound*, a mild, diverting flick that indeed showed signs of life. But I'd start with *The Great Mouse Detective*, a witty take on Sherlock Holmes that holds up well today. And Clements went on to helm *The Little Mermaid* — which is a bona fide classic — and then box office phenomenon *Aladdin*. Now Disney is so in-demand it releases straight-to-DVD fare like *Tarzan & Jane*, a forgettable sequel to its best recent animated movie. I keep thinking such sub-par fare will dilute the appeal of their franchises. But fans keep snapping them up so Disney will undoubtedly keep making them.