

DVD Reviews

NEW SPIN ON OLD PICS

By DIANE GARRETT

Like latenight pitchmen for Ginsu knives, Hollywood keeps upping the ante in their drive to sell more catalog fare. Studios have progressed from double-feature discs to triple features, while lavish box sets are being released side by side with film collections that offer affordability but few bells and whistles.

In some of the multi-title sets, the movies seem almost like an afterthought. But that may be wise, given how marginal some of these pics are.

None of the five pics in Universal's "Cary Grant Screen Legend Collection," for instance, could be construed as his finest, though they're not without their charms. All made early in his career when he was under contract at Paramount, the pics include "Thirty Day Princess," a fitfully fizzy romp co-penned by Preston Sturges, and "Kiss and Make Up," a strangely compelling allegory about the dangers of cosmetic surgery set in Paris, with Grant the shallow doc who learns to appreciate his faithful secretary.

U's "Carole Lombard: The Glamour Collection," released earlier this year, has even more pics (six) and a lower price (\$26.98 to Grant's \$29.98 set) but flimsier packaging with plot descriptions reduced to a few words each.

Warner, meanwhile, has started stuffing three pics on a single disc for \$14.98 each. Its first wave, released early last month, included some early John Wayne Westerns (co-starring Duke the miracle horse!) and Randolph Scott oaters making their disc debut, along with more recent fare. Some newer trilogies come with a few extras, but the focus is on movies, not bonus features.

This no-to-low-frill approach allows studios to reap more coin from their libraries

without major expense. Studios have already mined their vaults for the biggest gems, but plenty of interesting (if limited in appeal) pics remain untapped on DVD.

More recent catalog releases also have enormous potential provided the price is

no featurettes on Sturges, a colorful character who enjoyed a creative burst in the 1940s with many of the films here, or references to the fact that the Coen brothers' "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" was inspired by Hollywood satire "Sullivan's Travels."



right. In their quest for coin, studios have ramped up double features in the past year to include popular hits such as "Legally Blonde" and "Legally Blonde 2."

Sony, which has been bullish about double features, also has explored triple features but has yet to release any.

"DVD is getting into mass market with more price-conscious consumers," explains Warner homevid exec marketing VP Ken Graffeo. "The key thing to the purchase of a DVD is you have to like the movie," maintains U homevid exec marketing VP Ken Graffeo.

Still, cinephiles can be excused for their disappointment, given the quality of the pics. Those eager to learn more can turn to the Criterion releases of "Sullivan's Travels" and "The Lady Eve," but what of the pics making their DVD debut?

In its Cary Grant box set earlier this year, Sony at least included several short featurettes on the star and his work at Columbia. That five-disc set, which includes "His Girl Friday" and the DVD debut of "Holiday," was relatively affordable at \$49.95.

Another disappointment: the print quality on some of the older pics making their debut. "People are trying to artificially drive growth by lowering prices," says Fox homevid exec VP and G.M. Simon Swart. "We don't intentionally stamp things out," Graffeo says. "There's a life cycle for different product."

Some studio execs, meanwhile, worry that focusing on lower prices hurts the biz overall. "People are trying to artificially drive growth by lowering prices," says Fox homevid exec VP and G.M. Simon Swart. "We don't intentionally stamp things out," Graffeo says. "There's a life cycle for different product."

DIE BUECHSE DER PANDORA
(PANDORA'S BOX)

A Criterion Collection release of the 1929 G.W. Pabst film.

With: Louise Brooks, Fritz Kortner, Franz Lederer, Carl Goetz, Alice Roberts, Gustav Diessl.

Release: Nov. 28
Two-disc set: \$39.95

By DADE HAYES

Few more extraordinary Hollywood stories exist than that of Louise Brooks. The helmet-haired dancer from Wichita shot to stardom at age 20 with her erotically charged turn in the German silent epic "Pandora's Box." Criterion Collection's double-disc set honors the film but also mines Brooks' life and legacy and, as a side dish, that of director G.W. Pabst. Viewers will find themselves as transfixed as 1920s auds discovering the flapper queen.

In her Jazz Age heyday, Brooks defied Hollywood studios, courted censorship with sexual frankness, and loved and left a phalanx of suitors including Charlie Chaplin and CBS founder William Paley. By the time talkies arrived to stay, however, she was blacklisted from Hollywood. After several lost decades came a startling third act: She found fame as a writer, hitting the bestseller list with "Lulu in Hollywood," a collection of autobiographical essays named after the siren she played in "Pandora's Box."

Cinephiles will feast on the film and the second disc of bonus features. The trove includes a 1998 TVCM special, a rare 1971 interview, four soundtracks by different composers and a robust booklet with essays by Kenneth Tynan and J. Hoberman and some of Brooks' writing.

Boosted by Criterion's ace restoration, the pic transcends the limits of the silent era. As Lulu flits among gentleman callers, she embodies both pure innocence and unbridled lust. When fate has her meeting Jack the Ripper as a degraded and desperate prostitute, the tension and poignancy of their *dance macabre* is made gripping by Brooks' lack of guile.

In the 71 interview, Brooks explains her appeal: "When I acted, I hadn't the slightest idea what I was doing. I was simply playing myself, which is the hardest thing in the world to do."

KING KONG: DELUXE
EXTENDED EDITION

A Universal Studios Home Entertainment release of the 2005 film.
With: Naomi Watts, Jack Black, Adrien Brody.
Release: Nov. 14
Three-disc set: \$34.98

By DAVE LEWIS

It may not be one of the Eight Wonders of the DVD World, but the new three-disc "King Kong: Extended Edition" will top many a Christmas list, just as surely as Kong topped the Empire State building. Adding more footage to Peter Jackson's three-hour redo may seem a tad unnecessary, but the extra scenes (as well as some truly Kong-sized bonus features) make this an indispensable trophy for DVD junkies.



With a new running time of three hours and 21 minutes (the 1933 original ran just 100 minutes), it's no wonder the pic's extras are larger than life as well. The set has 38 more minutes of deleted footage that didn't make the extended cut; even the bloopers, primarily of thesp Jack Black clowning on set, run for an unusually long 18 minutes.

Disc three is dominated by "Re-creating the Eighth Wonder: The Making of King Kong," a three-hour collection of featurettes detailing the genesis of the project through the film's exhaustive physical production.

"Kong" has always been Jackson's pet project; the docu includes tantalizing glimpses of the helmer's first attempt to remake the giant ape pic—at age 12.

Jackson's sly sense of humor and contagious sense of wonder helps hold all the sprawling extras together. The one area where the set doesn't shine is in its filmsy packaging. Surely, Jackson would not approve.

THE CONFORMIST:
EXTENDED EDITION

A Paramount Home Entertainment release of the 1970 film.
With: Jean-Louis Trintignant, Stefania Sandrelli, Gastone Maschin.
Release: Dec. 5
Single disc: \$14.99

By DADE HAYES

You get what you pay for with this bargain-priced but woefully skimpy reissue of Bernardo Bertolucci's vivid masterwork. Another distributor, say Warners or Criterion, likely would have gone to town dissecting its depiction of fascism's wages in 1930s Italy and Vittorio Storaro's astonishing cinematography. But Paramount offers little in the way of extras—not even a commentary track or booklet essay—missing a chance to burnish its legacy as the ultimate home of the 1970s auteurs.

The main selling point of the disc is a four-

minute scene excised for that U.S. run (thus the "extended edition" tag), though since restored for recent reissues. Filmed in a basement, it depicts a party celebrating the wedding of Marcello, the story's titular protagonist. The host of the party is his blind fascist

friend, Italo, and many of the guests are also blind. Although unable to appreciate their effect, Italo has hung brightly colored Japanese lanterns that lend the scene a garishly festive glow. The disc also has three short docus, totaling about 40 minutes, examining the film's backstory and impact. But the only two speakers are Bertolucci and Storaro, interviewed separately. Both are articulate and engaging, revealing great tidbits such as Brigitte Bardot having vied for the part played by the sublime Stefania Sandrelli.

But why so few angles on such an enduring classic? Are none of the cast members still living? Could no one squeeze in a mention of the magnificent score by Oscar winner Georges Delerue? Some classic DVD titles answer questions before they even arise, making for an edifying sit. Sadly, that's not the case here.

