

New releases

◀ O'Toole dropped out, plus a lively trio (Redman, Kirgo and Dobbs) offering an astute, informed commentary on the film's fascinating strengths and flaws.

ITALIAN GENRE CLASSICS

DON'T TORTURE A DUCKLING

Lucio Fulci; Italy 1972; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 18; 105 minutes; 2.35:1. Features: original mono Italian and English soundtracks; audio commentary by *giallo* expert Troy Howarth; video discussion *Giallo a la campagna*, with *giallo* expert Mikel J. Koven; video essay by critic Kat Ellinger; interviews with co-writer/director Fulci, actor Florinda Bolkan, cinematographer Sergio D'Offizi, assistant editor Bruno Micheli, and assistant makeup artist Maurizio Trani.

KILL, BABY... KILL!

Mario Bava; Italy 1966; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; 83 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.85:1. Features: original mono Italian and English soundtracks; new audio commentary by Bava expert Tim Lucas; video essay by critic Kat Ellinger; interview with assistant director Lamberto Bava; Semih Tareen's short film homage to Bava, *Yellow* (2006).

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

If you want to ascend the dizzy heights of ornamental lyricism achieved by the camerawork of Italian genre cinema during its 1960s and 70s, you cannot do much better than this duo (released as separate discs) by two of the more flamboyant artists to emerge during the period. Both men were crack technicians – Mario Bava was the cameraman's son – shooting without the burden of synch sound, as was then the Italian fashion, and what they lost in performance without live recording they more than made up for in opulent optic poetics.

Bava's *Kill, Baby... Kill!* and Lucio Fulci's *Don't Torture a Duckling* are two popular successes released six years apart – by the time *Duckling* came out, Bava's fortunes had begun to fade while Fulci was still in the process of establishing himself as a horror-fantasy filmmaker after a career spent mostly churning out comedies. *Duckling* is in the *giallo* genre that Bava had helped to codify in films like *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1963) and *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), but it shares with gothic ghost story *Kill, Baby... Kill!* a rural setting and an atmosphere thick with superstition. (Among other things it provided Federico Fellini with the model for his milk-pale little devil girl in 'Toby Dammit', his segment of the 1968 portmanteau film *Spirits of the Dead*.)

Bava's film, set around the turn of the last century, was shot in the historic hillside town of Calcata, and its every long shot is a little masterclass in articulating space with colour, marked with splashes of gelled light on crumbling medieval walls. Fulci, filming in Matera in the rugged south, lays his scene at the intersection between Italy's ancient past and mod present. An elevated new super-highway brings the 20th century into the prehistoric landscape, but there are still hermit mystics in the hills, and though the latest pop sounds come through over the radio waves they are cranked up to cover the death cries of a suspected witch. And while the suspicious peasantry of *Kill, Baby... Kill!* are finally vindicated in their ancestral fears, in Fulci's village of 'Accendura' close-minded provincialism is depicted as a kind

of fatal, epidemic rot, gossip and peeping the only permissible pastime outside of football and the church. Sexual liberation and hysterical, punitive panic in response to it, the twin poles that define the *giallo*, are both on hand in abundance, and the climactic pulping of the village priest's face makes for one of the most inspirational anti-clerical gestures in all of cinema.

Discs: A video essay by Kat Ellinger counters accusations of misogyny levelled at Fulci, while Brazilian actress Florinda Bolkan, in a recorded interview, happily describes her working relationship with the director: "I was Fulci's slave." Suffice to say, these matters are complicated.

BUSTER KEATON: 3 FILMS

SHERLOCK JR. / THE GENERAL / STEAMBOAT BILL, JR.

Buster Keaton; US 1924/1926/1928; Eureka Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate U; 191 minutes; 1.33:1. Features: *Buster Keaton: The Genius Destroyed by Hollywood*; *Buster Keaton on Wagon Train* – audio recording of Keaton in conversation with television writer Bill Cox; *Sherlock Jr.* – audio commentary by film historian David Kalat, *Movie Magic & Mysteries* featurette, location tour; *The General* – video interview on with Peter Kramer, location tour featurette, home movie footage, introductions by Orson Welles, Gloria Swanson; *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* – video essay on the making of the film; essay by Philip Kemp; archival writings; Keaton Family Scrapbook, Keaton family photographs.

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

The feature films made by Buster Keaton in the 1920s represent an extraordinary purple patch. At their best, his full-length films combine the relentless ingenuity of his short films with enjoyably sardonic storytelling. This Blu-ray box set collects three of his finest features in new 4K restorations. Alongside the movies, there is a rainy weekend's worth of additional material, some of which is new for this release.

The films begin with 1924's cinematic fantasy *Sherlock Jr.*, in which Keaton walked through the movie screen and thrilled the early surrealists with his ability to bend time, space and genre with stunts and edits. His masterpiece *The General* (1926) is here as well, naturally, in which Keaton spins sublime comedy out of a train hijacking during the American Civil War, and engineers what was then the most expensive stunt in film history, demolishing an entire bridge. Finally, there's the meteorological extravaganza *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, which dramatises Keaton's



Kitchen sunk: *Life Is Sweet*

paternal anxieties amid a literal whirlwind of weather stunts. This last film, of course, includes the single most elegant and audacious gag in Keaton's career: the falling house, which leaves the Great Stoneface immaculately unruffled.

Discs: All three films, needless to say, are attractively polished in these new restorations, allowing a closer scrutiny of Keaton's often classically symmetrical compositions, not to mention the microscopic twitches of his own face. That is to say, the images are as sharp as Keaton's own choreography. The prints are fruits of a collaboration between the Cohen Film Collection and Cineteca di Bologna, and they debuted at the Il Cinema Ritrovato festival. All three films have excellent orchestral soundtracks: *The General* and *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* feature music composed by Carl Davis, while Timothy Brock has scored *Sherlock Jr.*

The bonus material kicks off with video interviews with Keaton authority Peter Kramer on each film, and a full-length commentary by David Kalat on *Sherlock Jr.* – all of which are bursting with information. There's a new documentary on Keaton, subtitled 'The Genius Destroyed by Hollywood', detailing his travails with the studio system, and an archive audio interview with him aged 63. Vintage clips of Orson Welles and Gloria Swanson introducing *The General* on TV offer critique spiked with pungent nostalgia. Featurettes include home movie footage and tours of the shooting locations for the earlier two films and a clip about the original *General* locomotive. The booklet contains a new essay by Philip Kemp, along with masses of archive material, including texts and vintage Keaton family photographs.

LIFE IS SWEET

Mike Leigh; UK 1990; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 15; 103 minutes; 1.85:1. Features: short movie *A Running Jump*; commentary by Mike Leigh; interview with Jane Horrocks; Guardian Lecture (Leigh in conversation with Derek Malcolm, sound only); stills gallery; trailer; booklet.

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Mike Leigh's third cinematic feature is probably most fondly remembered for Timothy Spall's appallingly misconceived shot at a gourmet restaurant, the Regret Rien, serving such delicacies as black pudding and Camembert soup, pork cyst, and sheep's tongue in rhubarb hollandaise. But Leigh's chief focus is on the fractured North London working-class family who number Spall's would-be restaurateur Aubrey among their friends: gullible dad Andy (Jim Broadbent), his chirpily optimistic wife Wendy (Alison Steadman) and their mismatched twin daughters: practical, boyish apprentice plumber Natalie (Claire Skinner) and self-loathing bulimic Nicola (Jane Horrocks).

Food forms an erratic running theme: besides Nicola's bulimia and Aubrey's nightmare bistro, Andy's a professional chef who loathes his work (though he's very good at it) and lets his dodgy friend Patsy (Stephen Rea) flog him a hopelessly grungy mobile snack-bar that he plans to take to race-courses at weekends. Nicola only lets her sort-of boyfriend (David Thewlis) make love to her once he's licked Nutella off her breasts. What holds everything together is Leigh's affection for his characters, even

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