

Home Entertainment by Ian Haydn Smith

A Changing World

In February 2008, Toshiba finally gave up on their bid to dominate the future, home entertainment market when they announced that they would not continue to produce their HD DVD technology. Prompted by Wal-Mart's announcement that it would only be stocking Sony's Blu-ray format, the move ended a prolonged period of speculation for both the industry and its customers, who were reticent to invest in what might become the Betamax of tomorrow.

Blu-ray players and discs have since become a ubiquitous presence in retail stores and online. Playstation 3, regarded by some as the most capable Blu-ray player on the market, best represents the demographic that studios aim their blockbuster product towards, so it was natural that big-budget mainstream releases would initially dominate availability on the new format. A riskier proposition faces smaller, niche DVD labels and their decision over whether – or when – to change. Moreover, with the dark cloud of a global recession looming, is it a greater risk for these labels to invest in this more expensive technology or in not keeping up with what is clearly the future of home entertainment?

The number of DVD labels continues to increase, as does the casualty rate. The biggest fatality in the UK in 2008 was Tartan, one of the larger labels, who had dominated Asian film releases for a number of years, as well as owning the back catalogue of many significant directors, including Ingmar Bergman.

Most mid-sized labels are experimenting with Blu-ray releases. For some, the dual-release

of new titles on DVD and Blu-ray is a short-term solution in gauging consumer interest. For many, there is no doubt about where the future lies. Having increased their output in recent months, it is likely that, within the next year and a half, all BFI releases will feature a simultaneous release.

Masters of Cinema have also entered the fray. Their Production Director, Nick Wrigley, recently offered his thoughts on why special-effects-laden blockbusters were not the only films that could profit from being released on Blu-ray: 'Regardless of the type of film, Blu-ray presents every film in higher definition and at 24fps – the same speed as projected film. There are no PAL or NTSC issues and the image resolution achievable is breathtaking. There are something like 90,000 DVD titles available in the UK, in a massively saturated market. Blu-ray has a fraction of that out there, under a thousand – so the sooner niche films are released on Blu-ray, the more likely they are to be noticed and enjoyed.'

Another avenue open to home entertainment, which Liz Rosenthal highlighted in her 'Industry Focus', is the massive potential of online screenings. Websites dedicated to showing films that might not otherwise be seen by the general public are becoming increasingly popular. So, why not embrace the opportunity to create another revenue stream for a back catalogue and also attract a new audience? That is exactly what Criterion have done.

In addition to their DVD library and initial foray into Blu-ray (an interesting selection of *Bottle Rocket*, *Chungking Express*, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, *The Last Emperor* and *The Third*



Chungking Express

Man. And if you already own the DVD, you can upgrade for a reduced fee), Criterion have embarked on the ambitious Online Cinematheque, which offers the opportunity to download films to watch for one week, before choosing to purchase the DVD or Blu-ray (the cost of the download is deducted from the final purchase). A vast array of extras and writings on films can also be accessed. And, in conjunction with The Auteurs (www.theauteurs.com) – the ‘online movie theatre and gathering place for film lovers’ – there are monthly online film festivals to ‘attend’.

Regional restrictions notwithstanding, Criterion’s Online Cinematheque is a fantastic example of a label making the most of their library and expanding the size of their audience in an ever-diffuse environment.

DVD Round-Up

In a Silent Way

Artificial Eye follow-up last year’s release of Louis Feuillade’s *Fantomas* (1913) with his 1915 crime saga **Les Vampires** (Artificial Eye, R2). A criminal gang stalk the streets of Paris, led by the mysterious Irma Vep. Feuillade’s ten-part serial is accompanied by a number of the director’s short films. Those wanting more of the alluring femme fatale may wish to check out the re-release of Olivier Assayas’ entertaining ‘latex comedy’ **Irma Vep** (1996; Second Sight, R2), in which Maggie Cheung plays herself in a modern remake of the crime saga, directed by Jean-Pierre Leaud’s manic-depressive filmmaker.

Visit the Criterion Collection store to stack your shelf with the best in world cinema—from undisputed masterworks by Kurosawa, Bergman, Fassbinder, and Godard to contemporary classics from Jane Campion, Jim Jarmusch, Gus Van Sant, and many more—all in top-quality special-edition DVDs. Don't know where to start? Search our top-ten lists or explore historical film movements and legendary directors. You'll also find T-shirts, caps, tote bags, mugs, gift certificates, and posters.

www.criterion.com

Flicker Alley surpassed themselves in 2008. Two classics by Abel Gance highlight the care and attention that has gone into the method behind the label's practice. **J'Accuse** (Flicker Alley, R1), one of Gance's most important works, is a breathtakingly ambitious film whose themes remain as pertinent now as they were when Gance directed the film 1919. A significant advance both technically and narratively, the release is accompanied by two short films and an insightful essay by Kevin Brownlow. No less remarkable is **La Roue** (1923; Flicker Alley, R1). Three years in the making and filmed almost entirely on location near Nice and on Mont Blanc, the love triangle at the heart of the narrative is explored through Gance's radical use of montage.

Saved from the Flames (Flicker Alley, R1), a collection of films shot on nitrate between 1896–1944, includes fiction shorts, animation, documentaries and musical performances. Organised across a number of themes, the pleasure of the collection lies in its ragbag quality: from the river Seine flooding in 1910 and a dirigible arriving over Los Angeles in 1924 to an early Stan Laurel comedy (The Pest, 1922) and the wonderful Jazz Hot (1939), featuring Django Reinhardt and Stéphane Grapelli.

There is little doubt, however, that the jewel of the label's collection so far is the exhaustive box set, **Georges Méliès: First Wizard of Cinema** (1896–1913) (Flicker Alley, R1). One of the best DVD releases of the year, the 13 plus hours of the director's films is a stunning achievement and, like all of Flicker Alley's output, it is immaculately presented.

Vive La France

George Franju's affectionate homage, *Le Grand Méliès* (1953) is included in the Flicker Alley box set. Not one to shy away from the fantastic, the double bill of **Judex/Nuits Rouge** (1963/1973; Masters of Cinema, R2) shows Franju at his surreal best. The former is the director's remake of Feuillade's 1916 classic (released last year by Flicker Alley) and



Les Demoiselles de Rochefort

is both beautiful and unsettling. The lesser known *Nuits Rouges* is a fine accompaniment, featuring Feuillade's grandson, Jacques Champreux, as the criminal mastermind, the Man Without a Face. Franju's horror classic, **Eyes Without a Face** (1960; Second Sight, R2), has also been made available and has lost none of its power.

The combination of Michel Legrand's score, Catherine Deneuve and Françoise Dorléac's performances, and the film's lustrous beauty, courtesy of an excellent transfer, make Jacques Demy's **Les Demoiselles de Rochefort** (1967; BFI, R2) a joy to watch. Included on the disc is Agnès Varda's 1993 film, *Les Demoiselles ont eu 25 ans*, offering an enlightening account of the film's production.

Some of Agnès Varda's best work can be found on **4 by Agnès Varda** (Criterion, R1). Featured are *La Pointe Courte* (1954), *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1961), *Le Bonheur* (1964) and *Vagabond* (1985). An excellent booklet featuring essays by Ginette Vincendeau, Adrian Martin, Amy

Taubin and Director of the Year contributor Chris Darke, makes this collection an excellent introduction to Varda's impressive body of work.

Of all the Nouvelle Vague directors, Jacques Rivette has for too long been underrepresented on DVD. Bluebell Films have gone some way to rectifying this with three films: **Love on the Ground** (1984; R2), **Wuthering Heights** (1985; R2) and **Gang of Four** (1988; R2). Although far from the director's finest period, the best of this collection is the Brontë adaptation, updated to 1930s rural France. Pared down to its essentials, the consequences of fate are accepted as inevitable, the characters playing their part with no hope of changing their destiny.

A sense of hopelessness permeates two stark accounts – both brilliant directorial debuts – of growing up. Bruno Dumont's **La vie de Jésus** (1997; Masters of Cinema, R2) details the lives of a group of youths in a rural Flemish town. With its harsh view of life, frank sexual scenes and closing moments that bear the hallmark of Bresson's *Mouchette* (1967), it is a remarkable achievement. No less impressive is Maurice Pialat's **L'Enfance-nue** (1968; Masters of Cinema, R2). Michael Tarrazon plays a young boy whose violent behaviour finds him passed from one foster family to the next. This peripatetic life only serves to exacerbate his temper, until he finds himself in trouble with the law. Produced by François Truffaut, the two-disc edition includes Pialat's *L'Amour*

existe (1960), the director's fascinating short about life in the Paris Banlieues. Masters of Cinema has also released Pialat's **Police** (1985; Masters of Cinema, R2), which has many admirers, of which I am not one.

The English-subtitled release of Jean-Luc Godard's **Histoire(s) du Cinema** (1988-98; Artificial Eye, R2) finally arrived. No more does the non-French speaker have to browse the cherished ECM box set booklet that featured the film script, whilst watching a tired video recording. All eight episodes of Godard's eccentric, eclectic, frequently infuriating, but always fascinating personal history of cinema are present in this long-awaited box set. It is a reminder of just how brilliant Godard can be.



Love is the Devil

BFI at Home

With a collection of superb titles, the BFI has moved to the front rank of DVD labels. John Maybury's **Love is the Devil** (1998; BFI, R2) finally gets the release it deserves. Few films have attempted to portray the life of an artist



BFI classics on Blu-ray in 2009

The BFI is proud to present yet more essential Blu-ray releases with *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and Pasolini's *Trilogy of Life* all receiving their High Definition premieres in early 2009.

BFI DVD and Blu-ray titles are available at all good high street and online retailers including the BFI Filmstore: www.bfi.org.uk/filmstore





The Long Day Closes

as impressively as Maybury, a director with a keen visual sense. The first of two excellent trilogies, the **Bill Douglas Trilogy** (1972–78; BFI, R2) is a moving account of growing up. Also featured is the director's assured student film, *Come Dancing* (1970). One can only hope there are plans to release *Comrades* (1986) at some point.

Following last year's release of Terence Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), the BFI have brought out another two DVDs of the director's work. **The Terence Davies Trilogy** (1976–83; BFI, R2) is both a brilliant and painful work of cinematic poetry. Through the life of his fictional alter ego, Davies presents an impassioned portrait of prejudice, guilt, self-doubt and sexual repression, whilst never stooping to self-indulgence or pity. **The Long Day Closes** (1992; BFI, R2) focuses on the period that Davies has often said was his happiest. Cinema is an escape to Bud (the remarkable Leigh McCormack) and Davies invests those moments with a sense of magic, a world away from the frequently brutal reality of growing up in 1950s working-class Britain. It is one of the best films ever made about childhood from one of the UK's greatest directors.

Antonioni and Pasolini

Of the Italian films released on DVD over the last year, Antonioni has fared particularly well. Mr Bongo released **L'Avventura** (1960; Mr Bongo, R2) and **Identification of a Woman** (1982; Mr Bongo, R2). However, it is **La Notte** (1961; Masters of Cinema, R2) and **Red Desert** (1964; BFI, R2) that stand out. Both have been meticulously restored to their original glory and are accompanied by informative booklets. If *La Notte* is the most immediately accessible of the two films, the spell cast by *Red Desert* lasts longer, leaving one haunted by its evocation of Italy's otherworldly industrial landscape.

Sàlo or The 120 Days of Sodom (1975; Criterion, R1 & BFI, R2) is an easier film to admire than it is to like, but both the Criterion and BFI releases offer a wealth of extras that place Pasolini's final work in the context of the director's oeuvre; outlining his reasons for making the film and documenting both the production and its reception. An unsettling, uncompromising and important film.



Red Desert

Ray and Rat-Trap

Artificial Eye have released two volumes of **The Satyajit Ray Collection** (Artificial Eye, R2). Volume one is the more accessible and arguably the most essential of the two, featuring the stunning melodrama *Mahanagar* (1963), shades of *Wild Strawberries* in *Nayak* (1966) and my favourite of the collection, *Charulata* (1964). This final film is dominated by a searing performance by Madhabi Mukherjee

as a neglected wife who falls for the charms of her husband's cousin. Volume two includes one fine film, *Kaprush* (1965), which highlights Ray's skill in building tension, and two oddities, *Mahapurush* (1965) and *Joi Baba Felunath* (1978), which are lighter in tone, but lack the bite of Ray's best work.

Regarded by many as the heir to Ray, Adoor Gopalakrishnan first found international acclaim with his 1982 drama **Rat-Trap** (Second Run, R2). The story of the head of a feudal family (the excellent Karamana) unwilling to accept his place in a changing world, Gopalakrishnan presents his film as a beguilingly simple cautionary tale. The DVD includes an informative interview with the director.

Return to the German New Wave

Two directors from the German New Wave have recently had their back catalogue re-released. Axiom Films brought out the most acclaimed films of Wim Wenders, including his road trilogy, **Alice in the Cities** (1974), **Wrong Move** (1975) and **Kings of the Road** (1976), as well as **The American Friend** (1977), **Paris, Texas** (1984) and 1987's **Wings of Desire** (Axiom Films, R2). They all feature interviews with the director and limited editions include a collector's booklet with essays and articles. Most impressive of all is the **Wim Wenders Documentary Box Set** (Axiom Films, R2). It includes *Lightning Over Water* (1980), *Chambre 666* (1982), *Tokyo-Ga* (1985), *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* (1989) and *A Trick of Light* (1995), as well as an interview with the direc-



Paris, Texas

tor, articles on the films and extensive filmographies. Taken together, these films should offer ample evidence of the skills of a director who has too often been unjustly maligned.

Few directors over the course of the last year have been subject to so many re-issues as Rainer Werner Fassbinder. But very few are as deserving. For a long time it was almost impossible to find most of the director's work on DVD. Of the eight features in **Commemorative Collection 69–72** (Arrow Films, R2), *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* and *The Merchant of Four Seasons* are the best known, but *Love is Colder Than Death* and *Beware of a Holy Whore* are also fine films. **Commemorative Collection 73–82** (Arrow Films, R2) includes *Effi Briest*, *Fox and His Friends*, *Chinese Roulette*, *The Marriage of Maria Braun* and the stunning *Fear Eats the Soul*. Both collections include a number of excellent documentaries, including a focus on the actresses who returned to perform for Fassbinder time and time again.



Berlin Alexanderplatz

Fassbinder Volume I (Artificial Eye, R2) features *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?* (1970), *Martha* (1974), *Lola* (1981) and a documentary profile of the director. **Fassbinder Volume II** includes *In a Year of Thirteen Moons*, *The Third Generation* (1979), *Veronika Voss* (1981) and the portmanteau film, *Germany in Autumn*

(1978), which was made in reaction to the events surrounding the rise of the Red Army Faction. Though not as well known as the titles in the Arrow Films' collections, these volumes highlight the prodigious achievement of Fassbinder's 1970s work, not to mention his industrious work rate.

Most impressive of all is the release of Fassbinder's epic television series **Berlin Alexanderplatz** (1980; Criterion, R1 & Second Sight). No less daring in scope than Edgar Reitz's *Heimat*, it is set in Weimar Germany and encompasses the full scope of Alfred Döblin's immense novel, as it traces the attempts of Franz Biberkopf to lead an honest life following a spell in prison. Although both box sets are impressive, the ever reliable Criterion come out on top with their design (one of the year's best) and the inclusion of a 1931 adaptation of the novel, which was co-written by Döblin, as well as a booklet featuring an essay by Tom Twyker.

Other Directors

Peter Weir's **The Cars That Ate Paris** (1974, Second Sight, R2) remains one of the more eccentric debuts from a member of the Australian new wave; a cross between *Mad Max* and *Last of the Summer Wine* (a too-long-running British comedy set in the countryside). Weir's



Picnic at Hanging Rock

acclaimed sophomore feature, the dreamy, haunting **Picnic at Hanging Rock** (1975; Second Sight, R2) is treated to a three-disc edition. In addition to the Director's Cut and Original Version, there are two feature-length documentaries on the making of the film and the story that inspired it, as well as numerous interviews and *The Day of Saint Valentine* (1969), the first film version of the story, made by 13-year-old Tony Ingram.

In a short period of time, Mr Bongo, the acclaimed music label, has attracted a similar amount of praise for their DVD releases. Four films released last year justify the commendation. More discussed than seen, Glauber Rocha's **Black God White Devil** (1964; Mr Bongo, R0) is arguably the finest achievement of the Cinema Novo movement. Another classic of Latin American film, Tomas Gutierrez Alea's **Memories of Underdevelopment** (1968; Mr Bongo, R0) sidesteps a simplistic celebration of the Cuban revolution, in favour of analysing what it means to live in a post-revolutionary state.

Also available are two films by Wojciech Has. **The Saragossa Manuscript** (1965; Mr Bongo, R0) is the most famous. Acclaimed by filmmakers as diverse as Martin Scorsese and Luis Buñuel, it plays out like a cross between 'Don Quixote', 'The Adventures of Baron Munchausen' and Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. It is an intoxicating brew that, thanks to Has's delicate balance of narrative control and wild imagination, captivates throughout. However, when compared to *The Hourglass Sanatorium* (1973; Mr Bongo, R0), *The Saragossa Manuscript* appears positively tame.

Another highlight of the last year was a sterling transfer of Miklós Jancsó's hugely influential **The Round-Up** (1965; Second Run, R0). The bridge between *My Way Home* (1964) and the more severe *The Red and the White* (1967), it is a remarkable piece of filmmaking as well as a damning indictment of the inhumanity of war. Shot on Hungary's open plains, it is rightly regarded as a classic of European cinema.



The Round-Up

Japanese Masters

Youth culture, sexuality and sexual violence permeate 1960s Japan in the early films of Nagisa Oshima. The startling **Naked Youth** (1960; Yume Pictures, R0) and its more expansive companion, **The Sun's Burial** (1960; Yume Pictures, R0), offer a bleak portrait of Japan's underbelly, whilst also revealing the director's growing dissatisfaction with his country's continued adherence to an image of itself that had long since faded. **Violence at High Noon** (1966, Yume Pictures, R0) offers an even franker view of Japanese societal norms, with an account of a real-life rapist's relationship with his wife and his only surviving victim.

Violence is not so much a fact of life as a stylistic exercise in the films of Seijun Suzuki. **Tokyo Drifter** (1966; Yume Pictures, R0) and **Branded to Kill** (1967; Yume Pictures, R0) offer a spellbinding take on the crime thriller. With their blend of cool music, 1960s kitsch, vertiginous camera angles and killers too chilled-out to care, the films remain pop-



Tokyo Drifter

culture classics. Although **Pistol Opera** (2001; Yume Pictures, R0) is something of a misfire, **Princess Raccoon** (2005; Yume Pictures, R0), starring Zhang Ziyi, is a joyful confection.

Superficially, the thematic concerns of Yasuzo Masumura might appear similar to Nagisa Oshima's. How they are presented could not be more different. **Kisses** (1957; Yume Pictures, R0) is no more sentimental than *Naked Youth*, but it avoids the nihilism of Oshima's later work. As for **Irezumi** (1966; Yume Pictures, R0), **Manji** (1964; Yume Pictures, R0) and **Red Angel** (1966; Yume Pictures, R0), their blend of eroticism and the surreal result in a heady brew that leaves the viewer wondering why Masumura has never received more attention.

Shohei Imamura's Palme d'Or winner **The Ballad of Narayama** (1983; AnimEigo, R1) is finally available, thanks to an English-language anime and samurai film specialist. Arguably one of the greatest Japanese films of the last thirty years, it features superb central performances by Sumiko Sakamoto and Ken Ogata.



Kids Return

Although Takeshi Kitano's career as a filmmaker has been somewhat erratic this decade, his output in the 1990s was something to marvel at. **Takeshi Kitano Collection** (Second Sight, R2) features most of his best work from this period. It is essential for its inclusion of the previously unavailable *A Scene at the Sea* (1993) and the semi-autobiographical *Kids Return* (1996). Their mix

of tenderness and brutality prefigures Kitano's best film, *Hana-Bi* (1997), which would have been more welcome in the collection than the feeble comedy, *Getting Any* (1994).

Masters of Cinema have released a number of Kenji Mizoguchi films as double bills, the highlights of which are **Chikamatsu Monogatari/Uwasa No Onna** (1954; Masters of Cinema, R2) and **Ugetsu Monogatari/Oyû-sama** (1953/51; Masters of Cinema, R2). The former features two accounts of a love affair, one historical and one contemporary. The better known of the two, *Chikamatsu Monogatari*, tells the tale of an affair between a merchant's wife and his employee. Through a series of misunderstandings, the pair are accused of being lovers and are forced to run away. While in hiding, their relationship develops, which Mizoguchi presents with an empathetic eye for the small moments of intimacy between the couple. One of cinema's finest ghost stories, *Ugetsu Monogatari* is based on the writings of Ueda Akinari and is rightly considered one of the best films ever



The Last Emperor



Days of Heaven

made. Employing his trademark long takes to stunning effect, Mizoguchi blends realism with the supernatural in his recreation of sixteenth-century Japan. *Oyû-sama* concerns two sisters' love for the same man and stars Mizoguchi regular, Tanaka Kinuyo (she appears in both films). The quality of the releases (as one has come to expect of all Masters of Cinema titles) – from the transfer of the film, to the wealth of extras – are exceptional.

Essential Criteria

Another label where the quality is a given is Criterion. Both **The Ice Storm** (1997; Criterion, R1) and Terence Malick's **Days of Heaven** (1978; Criterion, R1) are sterling releases. The former is arguably Ang Lee's best film to date, while Malick's film continues to bewitch. Its digitally re-mastered transfer is breathtaking, presenting Nestor Almendros's stunning images in a way that has rarely been seen since the film originally screened.

The four-disc edition of **The Last Emperor** (1987; Criterion, R1) presents fine digital transfers of the theatrical and television versions of the film, as well as a plethora of extras, including five documentaries, interviews with those involved in making the film and an illustrated booklet featuring essays, interviews and a production diary. The transfer is suitably impressive. Interestingly, it is the television version that impresses the most. Fifty minutes longer than the theatrical version, it acquires a more stately pace, allowing Bertolucci's daring character study to unfold into one of the finest films of the 1980s.

Paul Schrader's **Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters** also appears in a wonderful edition. His most visually accomplished film, Schrader was closely involved in the release and the care and attention pays off handsomely; from the eye-catching cover design to the extras, including the BBC's fascinating 'The Strange Case of Yukio Mishima'. Something of a companion piece (or vice-versa) to Schrader's film, **Patriotism**, Yukio Mishima's only film was, for me, the surprise of the year. Shot over two days in 1965 and based on the author's own short story (included in the booklet), it is a film of devastating intensity, whose blurring of the lines between death and sexual desire places this film alongside Genet's *Un chant d'amour* (1950) as one of the erotic masterpieces of world cinema.



The Ice Storm

Total Eclipse

Following last year's Late Ozu I wondered if Eclipse, Criterion's sister label, would bring out his early family comedy *I Was Born, But...* (1932). Lo and behold, the new year saw the release of **Silent Ozu** (Eclipse, R1), featuring that film and two others from the period, *Tokyo Chorus* (1931) and *Passing Fancy* (1933), which witness the director's vision fully formed, although their light humour might surprise anyone only used to the director's later work.

Lubitsch Musicals (Eclipse, R1) covers the same period as the Ozu and also displays a deftness of touch. The films are a pleasure to watch, particularly in the coupling of Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald. What

Love Parade (1929), *Monte Carlo* (1930) and *One Hour With You* (1932) did was to blend a European sensibility with the best technology of the time, which created the template for the film musical. A highlight of the collection is Claudette Colbert's manic performance in *The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931), which beggars belief.

Postwar Kurosawa (Eclipse, R1) is something of a mixed bag, featuring five films in a modern-day setting. *The Idiot* (1951) is an ambitious, but only partially successful, update of the Dostoyevsky novel. *No Regrets for Our Youth* (1946), featuring the director's only female protagonist, often simmers without a sense that it is building up to anything. *One Wonderful Sunday* (1947), Kurosawa's only foray into *shomin-geki*, is a slice of bittersweet whimsy, as he presents a couple attempting to make ends meet, their meagre earnings allowing them a brief respite from their hardship each Sunday, which they spend in a park. But it is Toshiro Mifune's collaboration with Kurosawa on *Scandal* (1950) and *I Live in Fear* (1955) that makes the box set worthwhile. The former is an early attack on media intrusion and freedom of speech, while the last film in the collection features a searing performance from the actor as an older man living in fear of the nuclear age.

Documentary

Interest in feature documentary releases may have waned in the last few years, but, on DVD, there is a whole world to be discovered. Where better to start than with the BFI's exceptional box sets, **Land of Promise** (BFI, R2) and **Addressing the Nation** (BFI, R2). The former covers the British documentary film movement from 1930–1950, featuring over forty films from acclaimed directors such as John Grierson, Humphrey Jennings, Robert Flaherty, Basil Wright, Paul Rotha and Arthur Elton. As a document of the period the films featured are invaluable, but they also possess an impressive aesthetic quality. Likewise, the first volume of films from the GPO Film

Unit, Addressing the Nation, covering the period 1933–35, are by turns fascinating and a joy to watch. Cavalcanti's *Coal Face* (1935) perfectly blends Benjamin Britten's score and W.H. Auden's words with images from the frontline of the country's heavy industry, while Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon* (1934) is a heady mix of the informational and exotic, filmed on location in Sri Lanka. The inclusion of the joyous *A Colour Box* (1934) begs just one question: will anyone ever release a collection of Len Lye's films?

Bruce Weber: The Film Collection – 1987–2008 (Metrodome, R2) offers a comprehensive retrospective of the director's career, from shorts, music videos and his feature work: *Broken Noses* (1987), *Let's Get Lost* (1988), *Chop Suey* (2000) and *A Letter to True* (2003). Accompanied by a booklet featuring a selection of Weber's photography, it is an impressive release. Amongst the highlights is one of the best jazz documentaries ever made. *Let's Get Lost's* portrait of Chet Baker is both heartbreaking and an impressive artistic achievement.

Artefact Films is a new UK documentary label. Of the impressive array of releases so far this year, two stand out. Charles Fergusson's **No End in Sight** (2007; Artefact Films, R2) is arguably the best documentary made about the Iraq conflict so far. Detailing the American occupation following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, it presents a litany of failures and betrayals that have endangered the lives of Iraqi citizens and America's own forces.



No End in Sight

Lake of Fire (2006; Artefact Films, R2) took Tony Kaye over a decade to make and the result is a remarkable account of the abortion debate in the US. An example of the power of documentary, it presents all sides of the debate, exploring all the moral, ethical and legal arguments. It is an essential contribution to an incendiary topic.

Cult Film

Few releases can match the warts'n'all collection that is **Caligula: Imperial Edition** (1979; Arrow Films, R2). Nutty as a fruitcake and presented in three different versions, Bob Guccione's production (featuring the extensive involvement of Tinto Brass, who is credited with principle photography) is strangely hypnotic viewing. Seeing John Gielgud and Peter O'Toole one minute and hardcore pornography the next is an unsettling experience. Arrow Films have released most of Tinto Brass's distinct oeuvre.



Caligula

For those of a more sensitive disposition, **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: Seriously Ultimate Edition** (1974; Second Sight, R2) might be to your liking. A high-definition transfer is accompanied by two discs of extras, including outtakes, interviews and deleted scenes. What surprises most when watching the film again is Hooper's adherence to the old rule of show less scare more. Compared with the recent trend for 'torture porn', the film is positively restrained, although still bloody terrifying!



The Texas Chainsaw Massacre

King of New York (1989; Arrow Films, R2), Abel Ferrara's magnificent crime drama is finally given decent treatment on DVD with a two-disc edition that features numerous documentaries and interviews. Hopefully it will be popular enough for a label to pick up many of the director's other films, which have rarely screened outside the festival circuit.



King of New York

Shorts

A focus on short films will be a regular section in the IFG from 2010. As some kind of introduction, it is worth highlighting the

work of Cinema 16, which has successfully managed to bring short film collections to a larger audience. The four collections are **British Short Films**, **European Short Films**, **American Short Films** and **World Short Films** (Cinema 16, R0). Each collection features 16 shorts by world cinema's finest practitioners. In some, themes that mature in later works are already evident, whilst other films stand alone as singular pieces. The films run the gamut of style, format and genre, but all display a remarkable vision by their creators. Cinema 16 has yet to play a wrong note; let's hope it continues that way.

Finally, refusing easy categorisation is **He Who Hits First, Hits Twice: The Urgent Cinema of Santiago Alvarez** (ELF, R1), an exceptional collection of films by the Cuban agit-prop filmmaker, whose propagandist film collages bridge the gap between news reportage and art film. Of the eight films featured, *Now* (1965) and *79 Primaveras* (1969) are stunning examples of Alvarez's style.

DVD Releases of the Year

- Georges Méliès: First Wizard of Cinema (1896–1913)** (Flicker Alley)
- L'Enfance-nue** (Masters of Cinema)
- Histoire(s) du Cinema** (Artificial Eye)
- The Long Day Closes** (BFI)
- Black God, White Devil** (Mr Bongo)
- The Ballad of Narayama** (AnimEigo)
- Patriotism/Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters** (Criterion)
- Silent Ozu** (Eclipse)
- Land of Promise** (BFI)
- Lake of Fire** (Artefact Films)



Lake of Fire

Key DVD labels

Ian Haydn Smith profiles the essential distributors of world cinema in the English language

AnimEigo

The definitive Anime and Samurai film destination, which also features a number of non-animated titles.
www.animeigo.com

Arrow Films

A strong range of films across the spectrum of world cinema, some with a fine array of extras.
www.arrowfilms.co.uk

Artefact Films

A new UK documentary label, featuring an impressive roster of films.
www.artefactmedia.com

Artificial Eye

A major UK label, whose extensive catalogue reflects the best in contemporary and art-house releases.
www.artificial-eye.com

Axiom Films

High-quality presentation of new and classic releases, running the gamut of world cinema and the arts.
www.axiomfilms.co.uk

BFI

Now an essential DVD label, covering world cinema, animation, documentary and archive material, and experimental film.
http://filmstore.bfi.org.uk

Criterion

The benchmark of excellence amongst DVD labels, now spearheading the future with the impressive Online Cinematheque.
www.criterion.com

Facets

An eclectic and wide-ranging selection of films from around the world.
www.facets.org

Flicker Alley

Specialising in pre-sound and early film, this label has quickly established itself as one of the best.
www.flickeralley.com

Masters of Cinema

MoC match Criterion, both in transfer quality and the extensive extras and accompanying booklets.
www.eurekavideo.co.uk/moc

Milestone

A US label, whose recent releases are a mark of high quality.
www.milestonefilms.com

Mr Bongo

The handful of releases from this relatively new label display a refreshing daringness in choice and design.
www.buymrbongo.com

Optimum World

One of the most expansive UK labels, covering all genres and tastes.
www.optimumreleasing.com

Other Cinema

One of the best collections of underground and experimental films from North America.
www.othercinema.com

Second Run DVD

An excellent collection of must-have titles by many directors who have dropped off the cinematic radar.
www.secondrundvd.com

Second Sight

An eclectic collection of films and TV programmes, ranging from classical Hollywood to contemporary world cinema.
www.secondsightfilms.co.uk

Soda Pictures

A diverse catalogue populated with some of the best contemporary world cinema releases.
www.sodapictures.com