

DVD Select: Fishing with super director David Lynch

by Robert_J_Hawkins

You know what's been missing from movies lately?

David Lynch.

That's right. David Lynch, the iconoclastic writer-director whose movies are the closest thing to a Bob Dylan song (both the good and difficult aspects of that).

DAVID LYNCH - David Lynch is an iconoclastic writer-director who brought us such treats as 'Blue Velvet,' 'The Elephant Man,' 'Dune,' and the TV series 'Twin Peaks.' In his new book, 'Catching the Big Fish,' he reveals his secret for success. CNS Photo courtesy of Penguin Group. JUST WATCH THE MOVIE - Director David Lynch says he doesn't include director commentary in his DVDs for a reason. 'I know people enjoy extras, but now, with all the add-ons, the film just seems to have gotten lost.' CNS Photo courtesy of Steven Yellin. DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the \$1 bin I am thinking this because I am just finishing up the paperback

version of Lynch's slender little book on movies, meditation, creativity, luck and - briefly - DVDs. I'll give you his entire chapter on DVDs in a moment.

The book is titled "Catching the Big Fish" (Subtitled: "Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity") from Tarcher/Penguin and it'll cost you less than \$13 bucks. It is available the first week in January.

The "Big Fish" are those ideas that latch on to creative people and won't let go until they are re-interpreted as movies, novels, paintings, short stories, songs. (Which begs the question: Who is catching who?)

Lynch has landed some whoppers over the years - "Blue Velvet," "The Elephant Man," "Dune," "Wild at Heart," "Mulholland Dr." and the wonderful TV series "Twin Peaks." The entire 1991-92 series "Twin Peaks" recently came out in a deluxe DVD boxed edition with the feature-length movie "Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me." One of my favorites of 2007.

I met Lynch during the promotions for "Wild at Heart" and I could have sworn that back then in 1990 he'd said that much of his creativity came from a bottomless cup of coffee saturated with an unnaturally high amount of sugar. Now, in the book, Lynch gives credit to meditation.

I could be wrong. And as you might guess, successful meditators are not heavy coffee drinkers. They tend to work against each other.

Then again, Lynch doesn't claim that his ideas come from his twice-daily meditations. Not directly. Meditation is the force that widens and deepens the lake in which he goes fishing for ideas - or ideas come fishing for him.

Well, it makes much more sense when you read the whole book. Which is only 180 pages - some with little more than a paragraph or two on them. Lynch is a man of few words, but profound observations.

He devotes one chapter, that is, two paragraphs to DVDs and why he does not put commentary tracks on his films.

Here's what he has to say:

"I don't do commentary tracks on my DVD releases. I know people enjoy extras, but now, with all the add-ons, the film just seems to have gotten lost. We've got to guard the film itself. It should stand alone. You work so hard to get a film a certain way; it shouldn't be fiddled with. Director's commentaries just open the door to changing people's take on the No. 1 thing - the film. I do believe in telling stories surrounding a film, but to comment as it is rolling is a sacrilege.

"Instead, I think you should try to see the whole film through, and try to see it in a quiet place, on as big a screen as you can with as good a sound system as you can. Then you can go into that world and have that experience."

Honestly? I almost never listen to a commentary track any more. And if I didn't write this column, I probably wouldn't spend a lot of time cruising through the extras. If I never see another blooper reel, that's OK by me. I get it that actors sometimes blow their lines and then act stupid to vent frustration or deflect a director's wrath.

And more often than not, making-of features are the equivalent to Hollywood air-kisses in which everybody is just crazy about how generous and talented everyone else was during the making of the movie.

Please.

We're not stupid.

A lot of DVD extras are just filler and like Lynch claims, a distraction from the main event: the movie. But then, a lot of movies need those distractions to avert attention from their overtly commercial shortcomings or their exploitive tendencies. I don't think it is accidental, for example, that the funniest stuff on the "Superbad" DVD is in the extras.

In his book, Lynch does tell little stories about scenes from his movies - usually to illustrate a point about creative sources, inspiration or pure good luck. My favorite is how the set dresser Frank Silva became the recurring character Bob in "Twin Peaks." A random comment, a reflected image and the flash of something across the consciousness of David Lynch resulted in one of the most curious and enigmatic characters in a most curious and enigmatic television series.

All because Lynch had his hook baited when the big fish swam by.

ALSO THIS WEEK

Moviewise, there are no big fish being released this week, since we'll all be busy greeting the new year and then recovering from all that. There will be no stars awarded films this week, out of respect for the creatively dead and my desire to enjoy the holidays.

"Resident Evil: Extinction: (Sony, action/horror) Third installment in the video game crossover in which the

genetically enhanced Alice (Milla Jovovich) continues to kick serious zombie butt and save mankind from extinction and its own foolish self.

"Solstice" (Genius Products, horror) A suicide shatters the bonds of a close group of teens, but while the group enjoys a summer break on an idyllic Louisiana lake, Megan (Elisabeth Harnois) begins to think her twin sister is trying to communicate with her from the grave.

"War" (Lionsgate, action/Martial arts) Jet Li and Jason Statham start out on opposite sides of the law, but when two Asian gangs erupt in an all-out war they find themselves uncomfortable allies.

"September Dawn" (Sony, biopic) In 1857, Arkansas migrants are slaughtered by Mormons - 120 men, women and children - as their wagon train passed through Utah, en route to California. Based on a true story. Stars Jon Voight, Terence Stamp and Trent Ford.

"Shoot 'Em Up" (New Line, action) Clive Owen is the mysterious and combat-efficient Mr. Smith who delivers a baby while waiting for a bus then finds himself in the middle of a small war. He parks the baby with a lactating prostitute (Monica Bellucci) so he can go after the bad guys (lead by Paul Giamatti) with both hands and feet. Word is that, for a pure action film, this one is all-out adrenaline.

IT CAME FROM TV

"IndieSex" (Genius Products) The Independent Film Channel's mini-series takes a look at how independent films handle sex - um, which is somewhat more graphic than commercial films but less than porn? The series is divided into three parts - "Censored" covers the history of film censorship. "Teens" surveys sexuality from the innocent romps of Frankie and Annette to today's provocative films like "Thirteen." And finally "Extremes" looks at the envelope pushers (like "Short Bus") and their influence on more conventional films.

More rarely watched TV: Season one of the English series "The Tudors"; seasons one & two of "Weird Science."

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