

DVD Select: 'Kite Runner' a great novel, great movie

by Robert_J_Hawkins

There was something uncommonly good about the so-called extras on the DVD for the wonderful movie "The Kite Runner" (DreamWorks, 3 1/2 stars). There are only two, "Words of Kite Runner" and "Images of Kite Runner," but they are composed unusually well and rich with insightful commentary.

'THE KITE RUNNER' - Ahmad Khan Mahmoodzada and Zekiria Ebrahimi star in the gripping drama 'The Kite Runner.' CNS Photo courtesy of Phil Bray. 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 As I watched each one numerous little "ah-ha" moments popped up. It helps that the author of the novel on which the movie is based, Khaled Hosseini, was a gracious and generous interview subject. Hosseini offers insights on his own inspirations, his feelings about ways a movie must digress from a novel and his creative relationship with director Marc Forster and his crew.

The features confront the harrowing rape of a young boy named Hassan by neighborhood thugs as Amir looks on cowardly from behind a fence. Hosseini describes the scene as metaphor for the brutalization of his native Afghanistan, while Western nations look on.

Scriptwriter David Benioff points out that the book of an Afghan writer was turned into a script by a New Yorker for a Swiss director who guided actors from Egypt, Germany, Iran, England and France. Then a Spanish composer wrote the score and the movie was mostly filmed in China. Maybe that's a metaphor for the way the rest of the world should behave.

So, what was it? That I cared deeply about the book when I first read it? That I found the movie a nearly exhilarating experience? What made these features so compelling, so nearly like small movies in their own right?

The answer was easy and obvious, and I should have known: Laurent Bouzereau.

Any movie fan who loves to delve deeply into the stories behind great movies inevitably encounters Bouzereau. He is, hands down, the finest producer of documentary material for movie releases on DVD.

Years ago, when DVD bonus material was a novelty, and mostly shoddy slammed-together bits, I told Bouzereau that some day there would be an Oscar for DVD extras and he would be the first recipient. OK, I was sort of kidding. And sort of hopeful.

At the very least, he's elevated a commercial gimmick to artful heights, and dragged many a studio's home entertainment department along with him.

The French-born Bouzereau nurtured an early love for movies into a thriving career and that passion for films permeates his work. When it comes to DVD extras, Bouzereau's name is as close to a brand as Hollywood has gotten. Why studios don't promote that brand in DVD marketing and on DVD boxes is beyond me.

In a very old interview, DVDFILE.com said this about Bouzereau: "If you are at all familiar with the laserdisc and DVD 'special edition' as we know it, and even if you've never heard of the name Laurent Bouzereau, you have most certainly seen his work. In just a few short years, the independent documentarian has amassed an impressive body of work, and gone behind-the-scenes with some the world's leading filmmakers, including Alfred Hitchcock, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma and many others."

I don't think Spielberg works with anyone else on DVD extras.

On the Internet Movie Database, Bouzereau is credited with producing 245 documentary pieces for movies since about 1995, when Spielberg asked him to tackle "Jaws." Bouzereau has directing credits on more than 200 of those. Then there are the Bouzereau books about movies, stacks of them. But that's another column.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Jimmy Carter Man From Plains" (Sony) Got to tell you, after the last 16 years, the quiet competence, compassion, faith, humility, courage and intelligence of former President Jimmy Carter is dearly missed. Director Jonathan Demme trails the 39th president as he promotes his hard-hitting book "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid."

IT CAME FROM TV

Start flipping the dial for season three of "Battlestar Galactica"; the fourth season of "Sliders"; the premier season of "Invisible Man"; sixth seasons of "Wings" and "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit"; third season of "Party of Five"; eighth season of "Murder She Wrote."

In the eight-part "Terry Jones' Medieval Lives" the former Monty Python tries to undo the many iconic and misinformed images of the Middle Ages - hilariously promoted by the Pythons ... it's ed-u-ca-tion-al, but don't tell the kids. They'll enjoy it!

FROM THE VAULTS

I thought the Johnny Cash biopic "Walk the Line" (Fox) was just fine but apparently somebody has been crying out for an extended cut. If that was you, your order is ready. Pick it up.

Men should not be as good looking as Alain Delon, especially Frenchmen who have all that other good stuff going for them. Just the same, you'll enjoy the original French rebel in this collection: "Alain Delon 5-Film Collection" (Lionsgate). It contains: "Diaboliquement Votre" (1967); "La Piscine" (1969); "La Veuve Couderc" (1971); "Le Gitan" (1975); and "Notre Histoire" (1984).

MGM is feeling very Yul-tide this week with three Yul Brynner epics: "Kings of the Sun" (1963); "Solomon and Sheba" (1959); and "Taras Bulba" (1962).

Warner Brothers kicks off its monthly theme release strategy with a celebration of gangster flicks. The centerpiece is the long awaited release of the iconoclastic "Bonnie and Clyde" (1967) starring Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway. Beside it on the shelf is the six-disc "Gangsters Collection Vol. 3" which is mostly a celebration of the ultimate gangster James Cagney. The set contains Cagney and Ralph Bellamy in "Picture Snatcher" (1933); Cagney's "Lady Killer" (1933); Cagney and Edward G. Robinson in "Smart Money" (1931), Humphrey Bogart in "Black Legion" (1937); Cagney's "Mayor of Hell" (1933); and Bogart and Robinson in "Brother Orchid" (1940).

David Lynch's cult classic "Lost Highway" (Universal, 1997) makes its DVD debut. In his meditative memoir "Catching the Big Fish," Lynch confesses that he was obsessed with the O.J. Simpson trial when writing the script, with Barry Gifford. He stumbled on the term "photogenic fugue" in which "the mind tricks itself to escape some horror." That explains how O.J. could smile through his murder trial. Hope it helps explain "Lost Highway."

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