

SAN ANTONIO CURRENT

07/26/2006

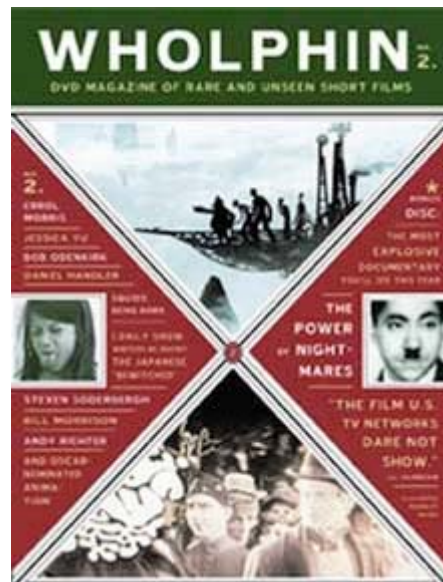
Media Armchair cinephile

BY JOHN DEFORE

No need for a bathroom break

The new Pirates movie is two and a half hours long. Superman Returns runs a few minutes more. The Da Vinci Code, as I remember it, was slightly longer than the Spanish Inquisition.

Film buffs who can't afford that much time this summer will have more luck at home, as a few offbeat DVD producers offer collections of movies that take only a few minutes to watch, and sometimes are best experienced just one or two at a time.



The entry with the highest profile is Wholphin, the new “DVD magazine” from the folks at McSweeney’s. The series’ second issue just hit stores, and it boasts some star power: Steven Soderbergh contributes a trippy little experiment, Errol Morris excerpts the “Movie Movie” he made for the Oscars a while back, and some Daily Show writers take turns penning goofy new dialogue for a Japanese sitcom.

In corp-speak, there’s also “value added.” As with Wholphin’s first issue (whose headliners included Spike Jonze, David O. Russell, and Miranda July) even the menu screens are part of the fun: If you don’t make a choice from the menu right away, what appears to be a simple static shot will eventually reveal itself as a short film all its own. But wait, there’s more! Issue two is packaged with part one of The Power of Nightmares, Adam Curtis’s controversial BBC doc about “the politics of fear” and the War on Terror.

Miranda July is also affiliated with the Peripheral Produce collective, a group of film and video artists who got together in Portland 10 years ago to host screenings of experimental work, and who now distribute some artists’ films on DVD. Visitors to Peripheralproduce.com will find some of July’s shorts offered alongside Naomi Uman’s Leche & Mala Leche, a doc that strikingly views the same subject through two

very different stylistic lenses, and Bill Brown's road-trip visions of Roswell and fiberglass bison. A particular highlight is *The Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal*, Matt McCormick's festival favorite, which is on both Peripheral Produce's "best of" disc and *From Tugboats to Polar Bears*, an all-McCormick compilation.

Similar in approach to *Wholphin*, but more modestly budgeted, is *The Journal of Short Film* (Thejsf.org) which is now up to its third issue. The first installment, released last Fall, offered a range of shorts — from straightforward narratives to enigmatic personal collages, with a few video pieces thrown in that were designed for art-gallery installation or recorded at live film/music performances.

For enigmatic artsiness (many would say pretension), it's hard to outdo Peter Greenaway. A new double-disc package from Zeitgeist, *Greenaway: The Early Films*, pairs one disc of '70s shorts (offering more overt humor than his more recent work) with *The Falls*, a long-form film set between Greenaway's early shorts and the features that brought him international fame. The Shorts disc offers an early taste (in *A Walk Through H*) of Tulsa Luper — the painter who, a quarter-century later, would be the subject of a series of features screened at the Cannes festival.

Also hailing from Great Britain is *Electric Edwardians* (Milestone), a treasure-trove collection of films by Sagar Mitchell and James Kenyon. The pair were hired, shortly after the birth of cinema, to roam through England and film real people going about their lives; the films would be developed and exhibited at fairgrounds, where the subjects could watch themselves onscreen. Found at random in a basement by two workmen, the original negatives present an amazingly pristine look at a world known only through decaying photographs. Paired with a beautiful score by a group called *In The Nursery*, the disc offers one of the most astonishing early-cinema experiences available on DVD.

On another "cinema of the people" note, *Monster Kid Home Movies* (available at Monsterkidhomemovies.com) is a collection of a sort I haven't seen before: It gathers all-amateur movies, mostly from the '60s and '70s, made by kids using the family camera. Gasp! ... as 5-year-old, loincloth-clad cave men beat dinosaurs up with mallets; Cringe! ... as *The Blue Death* turns normal kids into Frankenstein-masked zombie killers; Giggle! ... as the pre-teen vampire victim looks more flattered than horrified by Drac's attention. The enthusiasm and imagination poured into these little flicks (some of whose makers went on to work in film or comics professionally) are enough to perk you up, even if you've just been exhausted by a two-hour-plus thrill-ride through the Caribbean.

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