What I’m Watching: A Fish Called Wanda is a classic

Dec. 15, 2017 | G. Michael Dobbs
news@thereminder.com

I’ve been watching a classic British comedy, a documentary and two not-so-classic drive-in movies.

On Blu-ray: A Fish Called Wanda

Over the years, all of the members of Monty Python have tried their hand at personal projects, with varying degrees of box office and artistic success.

Setting aside the directing efforts of Terry Gilliam – which are considerable – and there is a mixed lot of movies such as “Yellowbeard” and “The Missionary.”

John Cleese’s “A Fish Called Wanda” did more than show he was capable of producing a starring vehicle – it gave him the chance to be a legitimate leading man with a love interest.

Cleese teamed up with veteran British director Charles Crichton, well known for his work helming a number of the post-World War II comedies from the Ealing Studio such as “Kind Hearts and Coronets,” and “The Ladykillers.”

Cleese’s script dealt with four jewelry thieves who, after successfully stealing diamonds, are trying to keep each other from walking away with the lot. Cleese plays an attorney named Archie Leach – an in-joke as it was actor Cary Grant’s birth name – who is representing one of the four thieves.

Cleese brings along one of his Monty Python mates, Michael Palin, to play one of the thieves, an animal lover with a speech impediment. Palin later revealed the stutter was in honor of his dad who suffered from one.

Complicating the various schemes to double-cross one another is the fact that Cleese is being seduced by one of the thieves played by Jamie Lee Curtis, who proves once more she is a clever comic actress.

This is flat-out a hilarious film with such great farcical moments as well as some outrageous sight gags. Arrow Video has done a great job with a digital restoration of the film as well as assembling some vintages extras, including a documentary shot in 1988 when the film was made as well as two new extras, including an interview with the film’s production manager.

“A Fish Called Wanda” is a wonderful addition to any film library.

On Blu-ray: Satan’s Cheerleaders, Ruby

I’ve written about interesting low budget films which have been restored by companies such as Vinegar Syndrome and Arrow and now VCI, a venerable name in home entertainment is getting into the act with the release of these two very different films.

Let’s go with the one that had me scratching my head: “Satan’s Cheerleaders.” Other than a great exploitation title, this film is very weak tea. A group of high school cheerleaders is kidnapped by a crazed Satanist and then are held hostage by a town full of Satanists in order to be sacrificed. Somehow one of them becomes enabled with the powers of Satan and turns the tables on the Satanists.

My finger was on the fast-forward button on and off during my viewing. I couldn’t tell if it was supposed to be a comedy of sorts or an actual horror film.

“Ruby,” on the other hand held my interest as Curtis Harrington, a filmmaker of style and substance, directed it. It is a mess of a movie and one that has become somewhat legendary as Harrington’s cut, though distributed to theaters was re-cut and re-shot without his approval when the film was sold to television.
VCI is presenting the original film in a package that includes three different interviews with Harrington, among other extras.

“Ruby” is part psychological horror and part supernatural revenge movie starring Piper Laurie in a bravura performance as a former singer who pines for Nicky, the love of her life who was executed by fellow gangsters 15 years before.

The merger of the two types of horror is uneasy at best, but Harrington always makes it at least interesting to watch. Laurie is over the top in her role of the vain singer who juggles the attention of several other men.

The fascinating fact about this film is that despite its troubled history, it was the most financially successful of Harrington’s films and he had a profit participation that paid off for him.

**Streaming: Jim & Andy: The Great Beyond**

This new documentary on Netflix details through a new interview with Jim Carrey as well as much archival footage the making of the film “Man in the Moon,” the bio-pic of comic Andy Kaufman.

This film is fascinating for anyone who is interested in the mechanics of acting, much less filmmaking.

Essentially Carrey revealed he became Andy Kaufman and Kaufman’s comic creation the talentless singer Tony Clifton and he didn’t ever break character.

Through on the set footage, this transformation clearly initially amused his co-stars and his director and then became a true pain. Milos Forman, the director, couldn’t speak to Carrey about his performance because Carrey was no longer himself.

In retrospect, Carrey seems to simply accept the transformation and did reveal it took him months after the production ceased to become himself once again.

This is a film about extreme behavior if nothing else and certainly held my attention.

**Comments**

Share this:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Google+

View Archives

**LOCAL NEWS**

- Agawam
- Chicopee
- E.Longmeadow
- Enfield/Somers
- Hampden

Submit News

- Longmeadow
- Greater Spfld
- Springfield
- W. Springfield
- Wilbraham

Obituaries

Post Events

**CLASSIFIEDS**

- This Week's Classifieds
- Autos
- Jobs
- Home Improvement
- Real Estate For Sale

Place a Classified Ad
A Fish Called Wanda is the movie to watch on Day 11 of the Christmas Countdown. Here’s all you need to know about the movie, including its success. The movie is a comedy classic. When a group believes they have managed the perfect crime, it all goes wrong when one of them decides to take the whole loot. That sets up a story that sees the rest of them try to find out where the loot has been hidden. Oh, and along the way, Ken (Michael Palin) focuses on taking out an elderly woman who had seen the original bank robbery. I’m sure you can guess how that plays out! It’s full of British and American stereotypes and never once takes itself seriously. That’s the allure of the movie and why you need to watch it.