

Films Fantastic 4



FILMS FANTASTIC No. 4
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A look at the films of Jean Cocteau, poet, artist, designer, and film maker.

It is difficult to even attempt to pin down the works of Jean Cocteau into any genre, although he was a leading light of France's avant garde artists. But they are

definitely Fantastic, reflecting the man's imagination.

Early in his career he collaborated with Igor Stravinsky, Sergi Diaghilev, Leon Bakst, among others. Among his circle of friends were Marcel Proust, Andre Gide, and Pablo Picasso.

Cocteau made ten films, one of which was not released. The most famous, and available for viewing are the films making up "The Orphic Trilogist"; *Blood of a Poet* (1930), *Orpheus* or *Orphee*, (1950), and *Testament of Orpheus* (1960). Of the three *Orpheus* is the most accessible, being a modern retelling of the Orpheus myth. The other two are fascinating, but beyond my ability describe. Probably the most straightforward of his films is *La Belle et la Bete*, or *Beauty and the Beast* (1946). This is a beautiful retelling of the famous tale and is my favorite version of the story. Visually stunning at times with an excellent cast it has the added advantage of no singing and dancing crockery.

Following are images from the four films mentioned.





Josette Day portrays Belle and Jean Marais is the Beast and also Avenant, Belle's suitor who decides he would rather have the Beast's treasure. More information is available at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0038348/?ref=nm_knf_il.

Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* is one of the best fairy tale films ever made. Its deceptive simplicity lures the viewer into the story and along the twisted paths to an effective conclusion. *Orpheus* is also a joy to watch as the character Orpheus, again played by Jean Marais, goes into the underworld in an attempt to bring his wife back to life. Death is portrayed as a beautiful woman and her angels ride motorcycles instead of fly. Cocteau is not for everyone, but it is interesting to see an artist explore the fantastic in films.

Film Reviews

Tom Feller

The House With a Clock in its Walls—

When an orphaned 10-year-old boy named Lewis (Owen Vaccaro) moves in with his warlock uncle Jonathan (Jack Black), he is introduced to the world of supernatural magic. Their next door neighbour, Mrs. Zimmerman (Cate Blanchett), is also a magic user, and by the end of the movie, they have formed a family. While there are some interesting scenes and visuals, this film is strictly for kids, because it lacks the edginess of the Harry Potter films. On the other hand, Blanchett is always worth watching.

Glass—

This film is a sequel to two previous films written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan, *Unbreakable* from 2000 and *Split* from 2016. Bruce Willis, Spencer Treat Clark, and Samuel L. Jackson reprise their roles from the first movie, and James McAvoy and Anya Taylor-Joy from the second. Sarah Paulson plays Dr. Staple, a psychiatrist who ostensibly brings the first three together in order to cure them of their delusions that they have superpowers. These are not delusions, of course. David Dunn (Willis) has been secretly fighting crime as the vigilante "The Overseer", and Kevin Crumb (McAvoy) was a serial killer suffering from multiple personality (at least 24) disorder. Elijah Price (Jackson) strictly speaking does not have a superpower, but he is a mastermind with a plan to outwit Staple who has a secret agenda of her own. Taylor-Joy plays the only victim ever to escape from Crumb and is friends with at least one of his personalities, and Clark is Dunn's son who has been assisting him as a vigilante. . Much of it was filmed at a former mental hospital in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and the visuals are excellent. The action is very intense and McAvoy's performance alone is worth the price of admission, but the plot quite messy and the film is too long, especially in the middle.

Happy Death Day 2 U—

Happy Death Day was a surprise hit in 2017, so of course we have a sequel. The premise of the original was that a college-age woman (Jessica Rothe) relives that day on which she was murdered over and over again. It is not much a spoiler to say that she solves her own murder and survives to wake up the next day, because the same actor and character appear in the sequel. In the new movie, there is a scientific explanation that she was caught up in an experiment in quantum physics, and now she finds herself in a parallel universe. This movie was better than I expected and even downright funny in places. Rothe is a very talented actress equally adept at horror and comedy. On the other hand, her romance with Carter (Israel Broussard) felt obligatory.

Way back in the Dark Ages when I first started collecting movies the only format was film. The serious collectors concentrated on 16mm prints which could be projected on a really large screen. Those of us on a budget had to settle for 8mm and, a bit later, Super 8mm.

Castle films offered digest editions of Universal movies and Paramount titles controlled by Universal. Best sellers tended to be the digests of the classic Universal horror movies. Columbia got into market and Ken Films which was heavy on Warner Bros and United Artists titles. Later 20th Century Fox and Disney also offered excellent quality prints. For feature films and classic short subjects Blackhawk was the industry standard. Mack Sennett shorts, Hal Roach (silent and sound) D. W. Griffith and more came from Davenport, Iowa, the home of Blackhawk. My first acquisition was The Laurel and Hardy Murder Case, a silent edition of the 1930 sound comedy. Later I added more L&H, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton's silent feature The General. It took me some years to work my way to getting a sound projector.

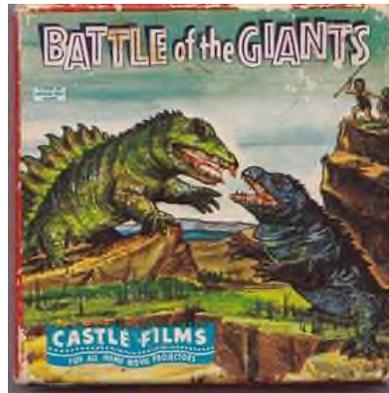
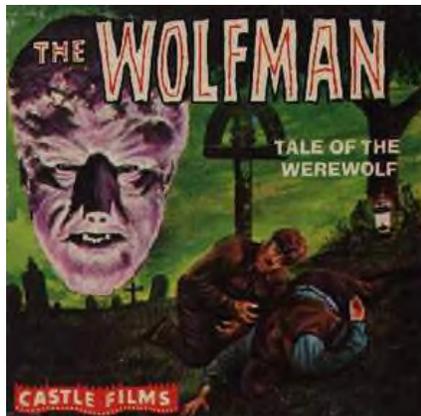
I also discovered other sources for movies on 8mm. From Niles Films I obtained a sound print of Eisenstein's Alexander Nevsky. Other companies included Thunderbird, Griggs Moviedrome and others I have sadly forgotten. And this doesn't even begin to consider companies located in Europe. I will admit to drooling over some of their ads in the British Moviemaker magazine. Oddly enough some years ago I stumbled over some Brit Super 8mm prints including Laurel and Hardy's Fraternally Yours, the British release title for Sons of the Desert.

Movies on film were certainly not cheap. A decent feature print usually ran \$80.00 and up. It was not surprising to see prints nearing the \$200.00 mark, and when the major studios started offering prime prints of some of their classics you could expect to pay \$300 and up, which I never did.

Returning to Blackhawk for a moment, they offered an absolute treasure trove of short subjects that covered a wide variety of interests. You could get actual film footage of the Titanic, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, Georges Melies short subjects, early Edison and more. Sadly, a lot of these seem not to have put in an appearance on video tape or DVD. Castle Films featured newsreels selected from Universal's archives, again something ignored on DVD. It was a treat looking at news from the Twenties and Thirties.

Today we have a variety of movies available at very low prices, titles we never imagined we would be able to own. But the special feeling we got from setting up the projector and screen for movie night just isn't here now. Movies at home have gotten too common, too accessible to have that special feeling.

On the other hand there are a few movies I used to eye in the catalogs that I have since seen on DVD and I am thankful I decided not to spend the \$80+ they would have cost then. Somehow The Monster Walks isn't that exciting and Haxan Witchcraft Through the Ages just doesn't live up to the hype. And the Beatle's Magical Mystery Tour is definitely not worth the \$90.00 asking price back in the Seventies. Still, it is fun to pull out the old projector and enjoy the experience of showing honest-to-goodness celluloid movies at home.



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