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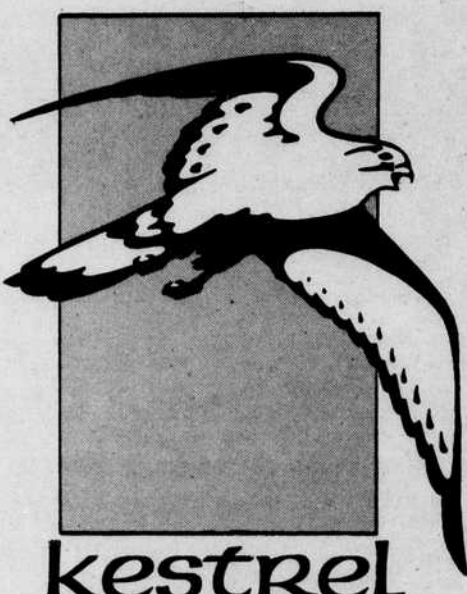
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VIDEO

SCAN LINES Video Reviews by Sean Axmaker

Oscar Winners & Classics

The Color of Money

The Color of Money gave Paul Newman his first Oscar in a career spanning over 30 years. Reprising his role as Fast Eddie Felson in the 1961 drama *The Hustler* (also available on tape), *Color* picks him up 25 years later. Newman has given up pool for liquor sales (for details check out *The Hustler*) but picks up the itch again watching young Tom Cruise effortlessly clean out a local pool shark. Cruise plays for fun but Newman, a composite stakeholder/manager/teacher, has other ideas. With the help of Cruise's girlfriend Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, he persuades Cruise into tackling the Atlantic City 9-Ball championship, with six weeks of "seasoning" on the road.

Tom Cruise is perfect as the flaky but enthusiastic talent and Mastrantonio (who received a nomination for supporting actress) is wonderful as his street smart girlfriend. The picture belongs to Newman, however, as much for the force of his persona as for his performance, and it is on his own redemption that the film turns.

Director Martin Scorsese has a winning ensemble in this trio and continually emphasizes their inner dramas with his always moving camera. The games themselves are invested with a dynamism that explains the love of the game shared by both Newman and Cruise, from graceful long takes to sharp cutting and striking tracking shots that follow the balls around the table.

Children of a Lesser God

A surprise hit of 1986, *Children* resulted in an Oscar for Marlee Matlin in her debut starring as a deaf woman who shuts herself into her own silent world. William Hurt is a newly arrived teacher in

the school for the deaf where she works as a janitor. Hurt sees Matlin as a challenge; she sees him as a nuisance. Yet they find commonalities and soon antagonism turns to romance.

First time director Randa Haines draws fine performances from her two leads and the supporting cast (including the deaf children Hurt teaches to sing). Matlin is particularly good as the angry young woman who resists entering the hearing world. An essentially silent role, she effectively and powerfully communicates her feelings and frustrations not just to Hurt but to us. Unfortunately the film stays more with Hurt, a wonderful guy to be sure, but lacking the vigor that defines Matlin, and most of our understanding of Matlin is through Hurt.

Children is a handsome drama with moments of good feeling and grace but it ultimately slights Matlin's strong willed character, who gives up some of the most independent elements of herself to "grow," due to the caring of a sensitive, dedicated man who has to make no such sacrifice.

Orson Welles on Tape

Orson Welles died in the fall of 1985 at the age of 71. On May 6 he would have turned 73. According to many critics he was the last of the great American directors, yet besides *Citizen Kane* his films are not generally well known to the public.

Citizen Kane is of course his acknowledged masterpiece, often cited as the greatest American film ever made. A sophisticated, complex drama exploring the life of a deceased publisher, investor, millionaire and one-time politician, Welles infected the American cinema with magnificent swooping cranes, portentous camera angles, graceful moving shots and sharp deep focus photography.

These stylistic flairs mark all of his work (and even some films in

which he acts—what director would ignore advice from the great Orson Welles?) but are much more than window dressing. The labyrinthine nature of *Citizen Kane* belongs as much to the editing and composition as to the screenplay; the leisurely period of *The Magnificent Ambersons* is evoked in stately tableaux and gentle takes captured with gliding cameras; the chaos of the masterful *Touch of Evil* is conveyed with a hyperactive camera and alternately arid and overwhelming sets. With his ear for soundtracks (trained during his years on radio), Welles' films are rich, evocative works which, though they were largely financial failures on release, have received tremendous adulation and acclaim in succeeding years.

Kane, *Ambersons* and *Touch of Evil* number among Welles' finest achievements, along with the giddy film noir *The Lady From Shanghai*, but by no means exhaust the Welles library. *Macbeth*, shot with paper mache sets on a B budget, is a fascinating interpretation of the Shakespeare classic; *Mr. Arkadin*, a convoluted *Kane*-like drama, has many moments of cinematic brilliance; and *The Trial* (based on the Kafka classic) is a bleak, nightmarish vision.

Welles' style infects the works of other directors, particularly in those films in which he is featured. His best roles appear in *The Third Man* (as the ruthless yet charming Harry Lime), *Jane Eyre* (as Rochester) and *Black Magic* (as hypnotist Cagliostro). These three characters could have stepped out of a Welles film and all three pictures reflect a strong Welles influence in the direction.

A Welles Videography

As director: *Citizen Kane* (1941), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), *Journey Into Fear* (co-dir, 1943), *The Stranger* (1946), *The Lady From Shanghai* (1948), *Macbeth* (1948), *Mr. Arkadin* (1955), *Touch of Evil* (1958), *The Trial* (1962). Welles appears in all of the above except *Ambersons*.

As actor (partial list): *Jane Eyre* (1944), *Black Magic* (1948), *The Third Man* (1949), *Moby Dick* (1956), *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), *The Muppet Movie* (cameo, 1979).

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