



Samuel L. Jackson, John Travolta & Harvey Keitel, *Pulp Fiction*

### That's Entertainment 3

Directors: Bud Friedgen & Richard J. Sheridan

We're into our third instalment and those MGM vaults are still coming up with goodies. Rampant nostalgia it may be, but *TE3* offers two fascinating hours of classic and not-so-classic clips that catch the energy and sheer inventiveness of the MGM musical, from *The Hollywood Revue of 1929* to *Gigi*.

There are some turkeys (June Allyson's 'Cleopatterer' certainly comes into that category) and some dazzlers, particularly in the dance department. These cover the gamut from the leggy Ann Miller shaking her blues away in *Easter Parade*, to Gene Kelly doing wonders with a sheet of newspaper and a squeaky floorboard in *Summer Stock*, as well as such camp little moments as Esther Williams in an underwater Grecian temple, pursued by animated statues. Discreet and careful archive-raiding lets us marvel at the cameras gliding around filming Eleanor Powell, as she manically taps her way through 'Fascinating Rhythm', as well as Fred Astaire side-by-side with himself in two takes of a dance sequence from *The Belle of New York*.

We see Debbie Reynolds both glam and rustic in two different treatments of 'A Lady Loves' from *I Love Melvin* (the former has uncanny parallels with the 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend' sequence from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*), and Judy Garland sings 'I'm an Indian Too', one of the few numbers filmed before she exited from *Annie Get Your Gun*. The studios were notorious for recycling costumes from movie to movie, and they did it with soundtracks too; *TE3* shows India Adams version of 'Two Faced Woman' being mimed, in two different films some years apart, by Cyd Charisse and Joan Crawford.

Lest we become too haughty, we're reminded that vaudeville was never far away with an early 1928 clip of The Five Locust Sisters and, much later, the extraordinary Ross sisters, combining harmony vocals worthy of the Andrews sisters with bizarre contortionist feats. We're also reminded of the respect the MGM musical

had for its charismatic performers. For most of Lena Horne's performance of 'Just One of Those Things', the camera dwells on the singer's rapturously expressive face.

We're reminded too that these films could be up with their Eisenstein and René Clair in the technical department (*Hollywood Party of 1934* is quite an eye-opener here) and also how the 'Jailhouse Rock' sequence from Elvis Presley's first film, although considered radical at the time, now seems to fit easily into the MGM house style. In fact, it even had a precedent in the Dodge Twins singing 'The Lock Step', with both set and costumes a riot of verticals. Well, as Harry Truman once said: "There's nothing new in the world except the history you don't know."

WILLIAM DART

### Serial Mom Director: John Waters

John Waters has already charted his fascination with violence and crime in his 1981 autobiography *Shock Value* — from searching out bloodied car seats in wrecking yards as a youngster to his admiration for the psychotic Gertrude Baniszewski ('perhaps the nastiest woman who ever lived') from Kate Millett's *The Basement*.

Kathleen Turner makes a fetching serial killer in Waters' latest study of the seamy ole suburbia. And she's a damned inventive multiple maniac, using everything from air conditioning units to legs of lamb to despatch her victims. What's more, she's a woman of some community conscience (one murder is a punishment for not rewinding rental videos, another is exacted upon a young stud-about-town for standing her daughter up).

There are many hysterical moments in *Serial Mom*, from an American nuclear family shrieking in unison when Turner flashes them a Serial Mom smile, to a scene in which Turner transforms Mink Stole (now a frazzled, if gracious, matron) into a foul-mouthed harpy.

The trial scene is a hoot, with Turner conducting her own defence and tearing the prosecution witnesses to shreds (one is exposed to

public ridicule as a non-recycler, a copy of *Chicks with Dicks* is found in the detective's trash) and managing (for a wee while, at least) to quell her utter fury with jury member Patty Hearst, for wearing white shoes out of season.

There are parallels with Waters classics. Divine is also a star killer in *Female Trouble* and much of *Pink Flamingoes* is involved with revenge rituals. Smooth though *Serial Mom* may be when it comes to studio values, one misses the rough-hewn amateurism of those earlier films and the 'stars' they made, particularly the late great Edith Massey. Now, with a girlfriend like Edie, Kathleen Turner might have been happy to stay home and polish the furniture.

WILLIAM DART

### Pulp Fiction Director: Quentin Tarantino

The film that everyone's been waiting for, hot (well nine months) after its Cannes success and released just in time for pre-Academy Awards fever.

*Pulp Fiction* elegantly presses all the right buttons for the mid-90s, from the quotes at the beginning to the slick symmetry when the film closes with the coffee shop hold-up. Tarantino fans are in for few surprises if they've seen *Reservoir Dogs* and *True Romance* — this man is *auteur* to the point of being obsessive. The only serious drawback would seem to be a 154-minute running time where once there would have been 100, but you're really getting three films for your money.

For all its lustrous colour and immaculately framed images (this film must have been storyboarded to the last flicker of Uma Thurman's eyelash) the ultimate strength of *Pulp Fiction* lies in Tarantino's script. The best scenes come across as self-contained spiels — a discussion between John Travolta and Sam Jackson about the niceties of Parisian fast food and that marvellous cameo of Christopher Walken in what Tarantino has described as a 'three-page monologue', with the actor spinning a Burroughsian tale of how his wristwatch managed to survive world wars and other dis-

asters, natural and man-made.

Tarantino may not have nifty quotes from William Castle and Gordon Hershell Lewis, as does John Waters in *Serial Mom*, but the post modernist impulse is still there — Uma Thurman dancing to Urge Overkill's Neil Diamond cover has Godardian associations; a creepy scene with Ving Rhames and Bruce Willis in the clutches of some Neo-Nazi perverts echoes a similar moment in Joel Schumacher's *Falling Down*.

How long Tarantino can keep the zing in this cocktail of gut-wrenching violence and belly laughs is a matter for some worry. Some day he'll have to make the move from pulp to good, solid hard-bound.

WILLIAM DART

### Bullets over Broadway Director: Woody Allen

*Bullets over Broadway* sees Woody Allen back in form after the diffuse disappointments of *Manhattan Murder Mystery*. It's a bitter-sweet backstage comedy set in the 1920s, that could have come from the pen of either Damon Runyan or O. Henry, an ambitious new writer (John Cusack from *Shadows and Fog*), has a gangster bankroll his new play as long as the gangster's chorus-girl moll has a good part in it. During the course of the rehearsals, one of the gangster's hitmen proves to have the real flair with words...

Well, the plot does lumber occasionally; not all is light and frothy or sparkles like the final glorious shouting match about art, sex and Marxism. All this and some classic one-liners too. As Ira would say, who could ask for anything more?

The performances are scrumptious. Dianne Wiest is the theatrical grande dame ('I never play frumps or virgins'), locked in interminable stagespeak even in the most intimate of situations, and Tracey Ullman is a tizzy delight as her poodle-touting co-star. Jennifer Tilly is energetically vulgar, in what could be Allen's take on Eliza Doolittle, and Chazz Palminteri is laconic as the theatrically-inclined thug.

WILLIAM DART

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