



Leonard Maltin's

# MOVIE CRAZY

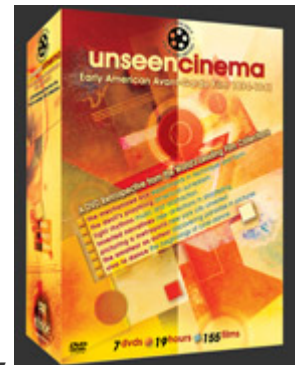
LEONARD'S PICKS

## CURRENT DVDS

**UNSEEN CINEMA** (Image Entertainment) — If most historical DVDs offer sustenance, this one might be called a banquet for the serious buff and scholar. David Shepard and Bruce Posner have culled from the world's archives and private collections a formidable array of experimental films from the end of the 19th century through 1941, divided into seven categories: *The Mechanized Eye* (Experiments in Technique and Form), *The Devil's Plaything* (American Surrealism), *Light Rhythms* (Music and Abstraction), *Inverted Narratives* (New Directions in Storytelling), *Picturing a Metropolis* (New York City unveiled), *The Amateur as Auteur* (Discovering paradise in Pictures), and *Viva La Dance* (The Beginnings of Cine-Dance.)

There are 155 separate titles here with a cumulative running time of nearly 19 hours!

Not everything is a gem—sometimes the value of a given film is in the eye of the beholder—but within this library are landmark titles (*Annabelle Dances*, *Ballet Mécanique*), bona fide classics (*The Life and Death of a Hollywood Extra*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *Stars and Stripes*), and exciting discoveries. I'd never seen Charles Vidor's 1930 version of the Ambrose Bierce story *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, or the stark morality tale *Black Dawn*; I don't think I'll ever forget them now.



I love having the experimental animation of Alexandre Alexeieff, Mary Ellen Bute, Norman McLaren and Oskar Fischinger in a collection alongside the work of such visual masters as Slavko Vorkapich and (yes) Busby Berkeley. I'm excited to see films by such underappreciated figures as Dudley Murphy and William Cameron Menzies as well as the celebrated Man Ray, Joseph Cornell, and Sergei Eisenstein. It's interesting to note that several of the more daring films in the set were made by the first generation of great film scholars, including Jay Leyda, Lewis Jacobs (whose *A Bronx Morning* is one of my favorite pieces on the New York City disc), Herman G. Weinberg and Theodore Huff.

Silent films are presented with newly-recorded music scores and introductory notes from a who's who of contemporary film scholarship place each short into historical and artistic context. (One may not always agree with the assessments, and the definition of "avant garde" itself is extremely broad, but the films speak for themselves.)

**I'm at a loss to find the proper adjectives to describe this set—groundbreaking, eye-opening, overwhelming are a few words that come to mind. Long in the works through the good offices of Anthology Film Archives in New York City, *Unseen Cinema* is a milestone in the world of DVD that should not be missed.**