Blu-ray Review: Pier Paolo Pasolini's 'Trilogy of Life' Gets Criterion Box Set

Submitted by BrianTT [1] on December 2, 2012 - 4:00pm

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CHICAGO – In the early '70s, Pier Paolo Pasolini made three adaptations of medieval literature that reflected the truly adult filmmaking language gaining popularity at the time. So many European filmmakers would try to copy the nudity, sexual humor, and scatological slapstick of Pasolini's "Trilogy of Life" that the films that inspired a wave of bad movies were somtimes lumped in with them. Criterion goes a long way to correct the historical record with their glorious box set for "Trilogy of Life."
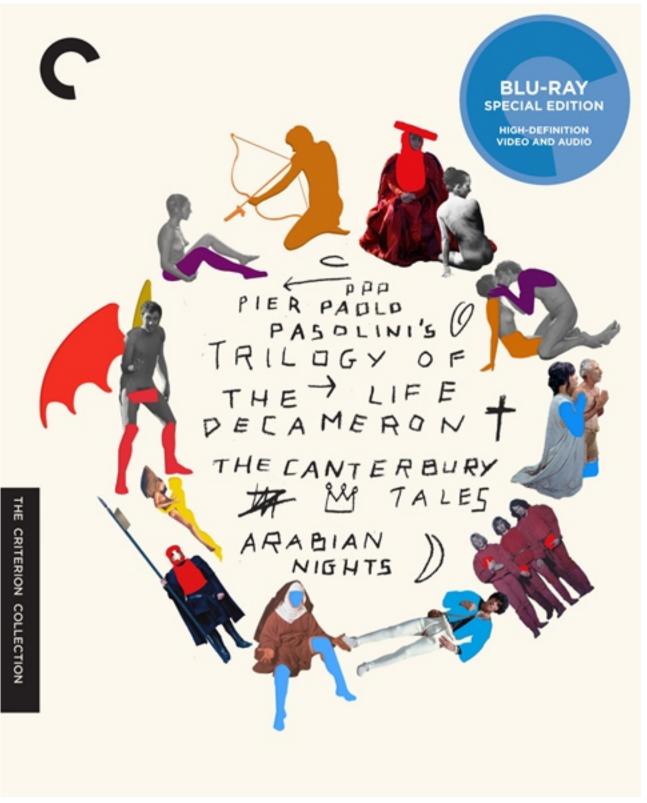
Rating: **4.5**/5.0

1971's "The Decameron," 1972's "The Canterbury Tales," and 1974's "Arabian Nights" make up "Trilogy of Life" and that third word in the title is exactly what they contain — energetic life. Pasolini was late in his too-brief career at this point (he would only make "Salo" after these three before his murder) and he was throwing caution and taste to the wind, asking audiences to readdress well-known stories from a new perspective. This is not "The Canterbury Tales" that you were taught in high school English class. It takes these classic works and uses them in the way that great literature should be reinterpreted — as a way to comment on current dynamics. In Pasolini's case, he used old stories to offer new perspectives on sexuality, religion, and freedom.

The films have been carefully remastered digitally in the way that only Criterion can do. They have mastered Blu-ray restorations for older films and do it better than anyone in the world of HD.

The special features here are stunningly good, among the best of the year for The Criterion Collection, who often do this sort of bonus material better than anyone on the market. What I love about Criterion's special features is the way they never feel like filler. They all feel like they are designed to enhance your appreciation of the works and not merely to sell Blu-rays. This set is no exception and fans will want to pick it up just for new interviews with masters like production designer Dante Ferretti (who did these films early in his career and his more recently won three Oscars in the last decade — "The Aviator," "Sweeney Todd," "Hugo") and composer Ennio Morricone, one of the most important voices in his field in film history. And those are just the start. Once again, Criterion has made an unpredictable choice for the latest induction to their collection and proven through its release why it was the right call.

Trilogy of Life was released on Blu-ray and DVD on November 13, 2012
Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

Synopsis:
In the early 1970s, the great Italian poet, philosopher, and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini brought to the screen a trio of masterpieces of medieval literature - Giovanni Boccaccio's The Decameron, Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, and The Thousand and One Nights (often known as The Arabian Nights) - and in doing so created his most uninhibited and extravagant work. In this brazen and bawdy triptych, the director set out to challenge modern consumer culture and celebrate the uncorrupted human body, while commenting on contemporary sexual and religious mores and hypocrisies. Filled with scatological humor and a rough-hewn sensuality that leave all modern standards of decency behind, these are carnal, provocative, and wildly entertaining films, all extraordinarily designed by Dante Ferretti and featuring evocative music by Ennio Morricone.

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"Trilogy of Life" **[12]**

Special Features:
o Visual Essays By Film Scholars Patrick Rumble and Tony Rayns, On The Decameron and Arabian Nights
o New Interviews With Production Designer Dante Ferretti, Composer Ennio Morricone, and Film Scholar Sam Rohdie
o Introduction To Arabian Nights By Director Pier Paolo Pasolini
o The Lost Body Of Alibech, A Documentary By Roberto Chiesi About A Lost Sequence From The Decameron
o Pasolini And The Secret Humilitation Of Chaucer
o Via Pasolini: Documentary Featuring Archival Footage Of Pasolini Discussing His Views On Language, Film, And Modern Society
o Pasolini And the Form Of A City: Documentary by Pasolini And Paolo Burnatto About The Italian Cities Orte and Sabaudia
o Deleted Scenes From Arabian Nights
o Pasoloni-approved English-dubbed track from The Canterbury Tales
o Trailers
o Booklets Featuring Essays By Critic Colin MacCabe; Pasolini's 1975 Statement "Trilogy Of Life Rejected"; Excerpts From Pasolini's Berlin Film Festival Press Conference for The Canterbury Tales; and a Report From The Set Of Arabian Nights By Critic Gideon Bachmann

"Trilogy of Life" was released by The Criterion Collection on November 13, 2012.

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