

## Blu-ray Review: Criterion Releases Perfect Edition of 'On the Waterfront'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 4, 2013 - 6:52pm

- [Blu-ray Review](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [Elia Kazan](#) [4]
- [Eva Marie Saint](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [Karl Malden](#) [7]
- [Lee J. Cobb](#) [8]
- [Marlon Brando](#) [9]
- [Martin Scorsese](#) [10]
- [On the Waterfront](#) [11]
- [Pat Henning](#) [12]
- [Rod Steiger](#) [13]
- [The Criterion Collection](#) [14]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [15]

CHICAGO – Few movies are as timeless as Elia Kazan's amazing "On the Waterfront," recently released in a Criterion Blu-ray edition that stands among the best classics-in-HD releases I've ever seen. And I've seen a lot of them. With amazing special features, including an interview with the legendary Martin Scorsese about how the film influenced him, and not just one but three HD transfers (for the three aspect ratios in which the film had to be shot simultaneously), along with a movie that actually gets better with age, "On the Waterfront" is the best Blu-ray release of 2013 to date.



Rating: **5.0/5.0**

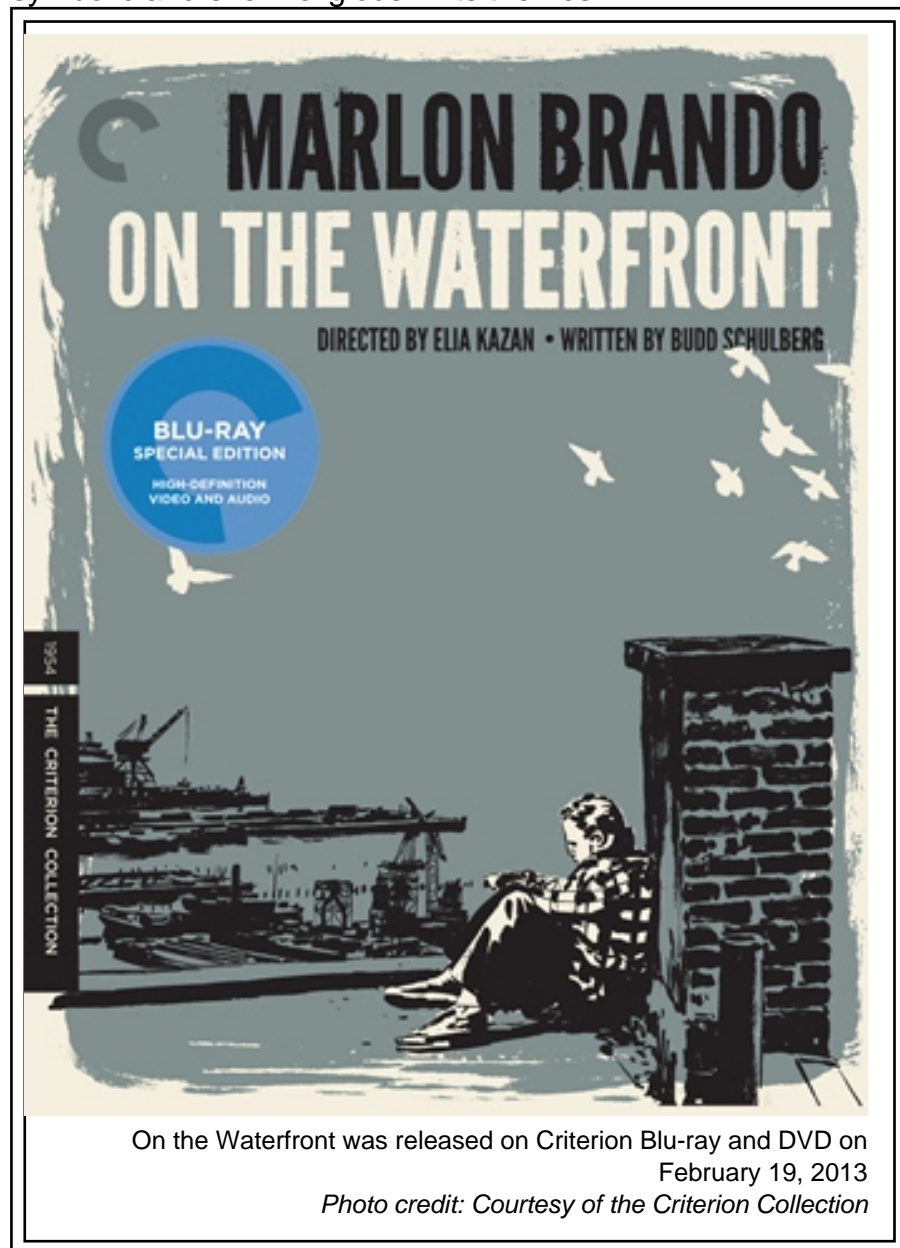
First, a word on aspect ratios (that is further detailed in an excellent visual essay on the first disc of the Blu-ray). "On the Waterfront" went into production at a time when studios were nervous about the encroachment of the television on the country's entertainment dollar. And so widescreen was born. Films were primarily shot in 1.33:1 before that day but the transition to 1.85:1 was fully underway. However, many auditoriums couldn't go that wide and wanted films shot in 1.66:1. "On the Waterfront" was shot, simultaneously, in all three and each one gives the film a different feel. 1.85:1, by losing the top and bottom of the frame, creates a tighter, more claustrophobic experience than the commonly-seen 1.33:1. The version chosen here as the standard, the one with the commentaries on the first disc, not alone on the second, is 1.66:1, the happy medium. I like different things about all three but just being able to so clearly see the differences the ratio makes in tone and atmosphere is a gift that could be used in film classes.



On the Waterfront was released on Criterion Blu-ray and DVD on February 19, 2013

*Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection*

Whatever ratio you watch it in, just watch “On the Waterfront” in HD. The film has held up incredibly well. It’s one of those works that I always expect to feel a little dated or clichéd when I watch it but it never does. The “glove scene” — the one in which Marlon Brando and Eva Marie Saint first flirt in the park — is one of the most perfect scenes in the history of film (far superior than the iconic “contender scene”). “On the Waterfront” is remarkable in its layers, working so incredibly well on a realistic level (the city never looked as gritty before it) but also deeply symbolic and even religious in its themes.



It’s no wonder it heavily influenced Martin Scorsese, to the point that he appears here in an amazing interview about the film. He speaks eloquently about the sense of where people live in “On the Waterfront.” The shirts, the paint on the wall, the set. It’s not just the dialogue but the truth of the entire production that matters. And, of course, the acting style that was so revolutionary at the time. He beautifully compares it to “Citizen Kane” as another revolutionary film in the history of the form.

The movie itself (in all three ratios) and the Scorsese interview would be enough to warrant five stars. The amazing wealth of other special features just keeps adding to the must-own nature of this great Criterion release. Don’t miss it.

#### Synopsis:

Marlon Brando gives the performance of his career as the tough prizefighter-turned-longshoreman Terry Malloy in this masterpiece of urban poetry. A raggedly emotional tale of individual failure and social corruption, *On the Waterfront* follows Terry’s deepening moral crisis as he must decide whether to remain loyal to the mob-connected union boss Johnny Friendly (Lee J. Cobb) and Johnny’s right-hand man, Terry’s brother, Charley (Rod Steiger), as the authorities close in on them. Driven by the vivid, naturalistic direction of Elia Kazan and savory, streetwise dialogue by Budd Schulberg, *On The Waterfront* was an instant sensation, winning eight Oscars, including for best picture, director, actor, supporting actress (Eva Marie Saint), and screenplay.

#### Special Features:

- o Audio Commentary By Authors Richard Schickel and Jeff Young
- o New Conversation Between Filmmaker Martin Scorsese And Critic Kent Jones
- o Elia Kazan: An Outsider - An Hour Long Documentary
- o Visual Essay On The Aspect Ratio
- o Trailer
- o New Interview With Author James T. Fisher About The Real Life People And Places Behind The Film
- o Contender: Mastering The Method - A 2001 Documentary On The Film’s Most Famous Scene
- o Visual Essay On Leonard Bernstein’s Score
- o A Booklet Featuring An Essay By Filmmaker Michael Almereyda, Kazan’s 1952 Defense Of His House Un-American Activities Committee Testimony, One Of The 1948 Malcolm Johnson Articles That Inspired The Film, And A 1953 Piece By Screenwriter Budd Schulberg

*“On the Waterfront” stars Marlon Brando, Eva Marie Saint, Karl Malden, Lee J. Cobb, Pat Henning, and Rod Steiger. It was written by Budd Schulberg and directed by Elia Kazan. It was released on Criterion Blu-ray and DVD on February 19, 2013.*



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- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/martin-scorsese>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/on-the-waterfront>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/pat-henning>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/rod-steiger>
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