

Blu-ray Review: Criterion Release of Peter Weir's Mesmerizing 'Picnic at Hanging Rock'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 14, 2014 - 7:10pm

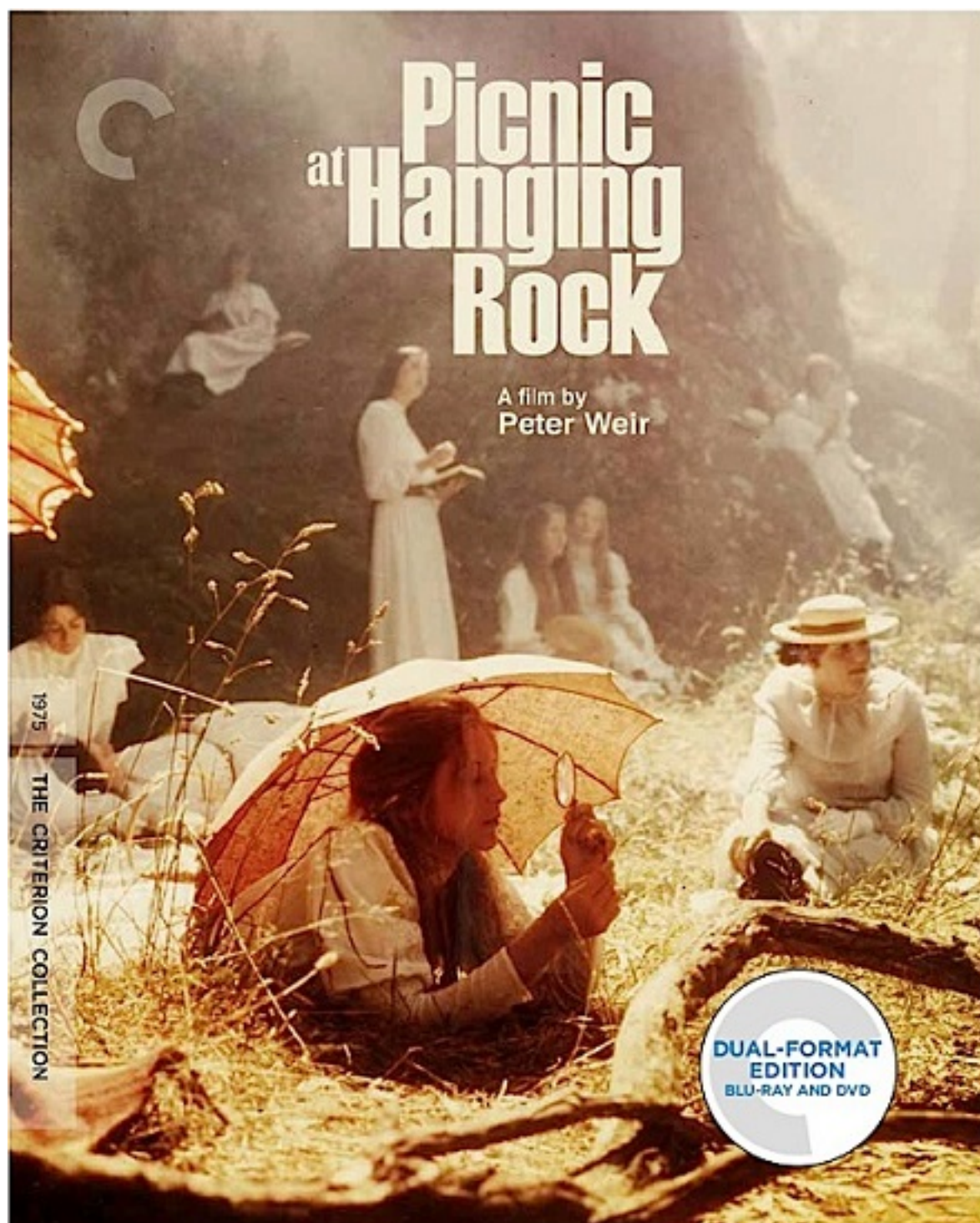
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Peter Weir's "Picnic at Hanging Rock" is a mesmerizing film. Most who go into it know that it tells a tragic (possibly true) story with no resolution. And so it becomes a slow burn, in which the atmosphere and dread of unseen danger hangs thick in every frame. Weir broke through on the international film scene with this surprise hit, a film that introduced the world to one of the best directors of the '80s and '90s. He would go on to give us more traditional and yet masterful works like "Witness," "Fearless," "The Truman Show," and "Master and Commander" and yet when I hear his name, "Picnic at Hanging Rock" is the first film I think of.



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

It is a defiantly bizarre, terrifying film that defies easy categorization or even synopsis. On one hand, it's a mystery, but it's one without a conclusion (which notoriously led to outbursts at some of the earliest screenings). It's a lyrical, poetic approach to something that could have been treated like a true crime story. It is about obsession, man vs. nature, and the magnetic pull of that which we cannot know and understand, personified most completely by the always mysterious nature of young ladies on the cusp of maturity and sexuality. Criterion's transfer seems to add a level of visual mysticism to the film that I didn't remember, bringing up the color palette to a degree where one can almost feel the heat near Hanging Rock.



Picnic at Hanging Rock was released on Blu-ray on June 17, 2014

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

Synopsis:

This sensual and striking chronicle of a disappearance and its aftermath put director Peter Weir (The Truman Show) on the map and helped usher in a new era of Australian cinema. Set at the turn of the twentieth century, Picnic at Hanging Rock concerns a small group of students from an all-female college and a chaperone, who vanish while on a St. Valentine's Day outing. Less a mystery than a journey into the mystic, as well as an inquiry into issues of class and sexual repression in Australian society, Weir's gorgeous, disquieting film is a work of poetic horror whose secrets haunt viewers to this day.

Special Features:

- o Extended interview with Peter Weir
- o New piece on the making of the film, featuring interviews from 2003 with executive producer Patricia Lovell, producers Hal McElroy and Jim McElroy, and cast members
- o New introduction by film scholar David Thomson, author of The New Biographical Dictionary of Film
- o A Recollection... Hanging Rock 1900 (1975), an on-set documentary hosted by Lovell and featuring interviews with Weir, actor Rachel Roberts, and source novel author Joan Lindsay
- o Homesdale (1971), an award-winning black comedy by Weir
- o Trailer

PLUS: A booklet featuring an essay by author Megan Abbott and an excerpt from film scholar Marek Haltof's 1996 book Peter Weir: When Cultures Collide; a new paperback edition of Lindsay's novel, previously out of front in the U.S.

"Picnic at Hanging Rock" is available on Criterion Blu-ray and DVD



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