





| | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| Excellent 750 - 850  | Good 660 - 749  | Fair 620 - 659  | Poor 350 - 519  | Do you know your Credit Score? Find out instantly! |
|---|--|--|--|--|

privacy.matters.com

[Back to Article](#)[Click to Print](#)

Wednesday, Oct. 24, 2007

Stanley Kubrick: Warner Home Video Directors Series

Warner Home Video

Available Oct. 23; List Price \$79.98

I'm guessing that no director, certainly no dead one, has dominated the DVD charts as Kubrick did this week. Yesterday, as seven of his films awaited their release on new two-disc editions (in regular, HD-DVD and Blu-ray formats, all retailing at \$28.99) or amassed in the 10-disc set listed above, the Kubrick oeuvre occupied three of the week's top 12 slots on Amazon.com, eight of the top 22, and 17 of the top 60. Quite a few cinephiles must think this is an event.

It is. Each of the two-disc packages contains well-chosen extras, coherent commentaries and helpful making-of films (most of them by Gary Leva, who's done fine jobs on DVDs for *The Maltese Falcon*, *THX-1138* and *All the President's Men*). But the big deal is to see the movies, now in their original theatrical ratio, instead of the TV-shaped versions previously offered on DVD. It's the next best thing — but still a distant second — to seeing the films as Kubrick intended them to be shown, on a big screen with a multitrack sound system.

Whatever else Kubrick's films were, they were Big. He made monuments, monoliths like the black slab in *2001*: beautiful, imposing, slow to yield their ultimate meaning. This kid from the Bronx, whose grades were so poor he couldn't get into college, eventually achieved a reputation apart from and above his contemporaries. As he aged and his hairline receded, he was the very picture of a gigantic brain — pure, huge, cool intellect — attached by circuitry to the soul of an artist, and gazing down on the small creatures in his films with fascination but without pity. He was the Yahweh, or really the supercomputer, of moviemakers.

Other people could have directed *Dr. Strangelove*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*, *Full Metal Jacket*, but Kubrick made them different. Each of these movies has signal, indelible images: the sight of an Air Force Major riding the bucking bronco of a nuclear missile; London hooligans sexually assaulting a woman to the strains of "Singin' in the Rain"; torrents of blood gushing from the sides of a hotel elevator, dark red, a menstrual flood of the hotel's malevolent spirits; the psychotic grin of a young soldier who'll die before he gets to Vietnam.

Kubrick directed 13 films, and except for the first two, all came from novels. (*2001* was an original idea he developed with Arthur C. Clarke, but at Kubrick's request Clarke wrote the story as a novel.) Yet no director's films were more thoughtfully cinematic. His movies were always on the move, through zooms or tracking shots or, in *The Shining*, the smooth motor of the Steadicam. A teenage photographer for *Look* magazine, Kubrick brought to his films a keen sense of framing, the placement of actors and objects, visual drama that would point viewers toward what he wanted them to see. What they'd make of what they saw was up to them. No director working in the Hollywood system had Kubrick's measure of respect for (or maybe indifference toward) his audience.

And no director pushed his actors harder. He insisted on high dozens of takes for many shots; he kept his stars in a kind of Stockholm Syndrome dependence for a year or more; he was not above inflicting physical and psychological pain on them. Malcolm McDowell, who played Alex the hero-thug in *A Clockwork Orange*, endured ocular agony in a scene where Alex is forced to watch a propaganda film; McDowell, who had the lid-lock apparatus on for 10 mins. needed a shot of morphine after the scene. On his commentary track for the film, McDowell doesn't really complain, but many actors found Kubrick's strategy grueling, demeaning, sadistic. It drove Shelley Duvall to tears and beyond on the set of *The Shining*.

For that movie, Jack Nicholson, as a blocked writer and abusive father, was pushed until he might have been as deranged as his character. On the film's commentary track, Garrett Brown (the Steadicam's inventor and operator) recalled that "Jack would give Stanley in effect the entire smorgasbord of performance, from catatonic to hysterical. He'd give him every gradation all the way up." For a shot where the actor is to keep throwing a tennis ball against the hotel lobby wall, Brown notes, "Jack did that scene 40 times." But Nicholson defends the technique. "When you work for Stanley," he says, "it removes the main problem for the actor, which is pressure. He's not going to stop until it's exactly the way he wants it."

That was the man's insane, heroic quest for perfection, evident in every second of the films in this package. In a 1997 acceptance speech on receiving the Directors Guild's D.W. Griffith Lifetime Achievement Award, Kubrick said: "Anyone who has ever been privileged to direct a film also knows

that, although it can be like trying to write *War and Peace* in a bumper car at an amusement park, when you finally get it right, there are not many joys in life that can equal the feeling." Nicholson recalls the end of Kubrick's speech: "The myth of Icarus, flying too high for success. He says, 'And people always took that as a moral tale about hubris.' And he said, 'Let's make better wings.'"

 **Click to Print**

Find this article at:

http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1665692_1665693_1675011,00.html

Copyright © 2007 Time Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Add TIME Headlines to your Site](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Customer Service](#)