

powered by **YAHOO!** SEARCH All **Advanced Search** Last Updated Sept. 30, 2005 7:22

SUBSCRIBE

Recently Reviewed

Posted: Sun., Sep. 11, 2005, 6:00am PT

- [EMAIL REVIEW](#)
- [PRINT REVIEW](#)
- [EMAIL AUTHOR](#)
- [DISCUSSIONS](#)

Ben-Hur

(Release: Sept. 13; Four-disc set; \$39.92)

A Warner Home Video release of the 1959 MGM film directed by William Wyler.

With: Charlton Heston, Jack Hawkins, Haya Harareet, Stephen Boyd, Hugh Griffith.

By **TIMOTHY M. GRAY**

Many DVD "special editions" are cynical attempts to seduce consumers into buying something they already own. But, four years after Warner Home Video's last edition of "Ben-Hur," the company is putting out a DVD set that merits the revisit. In keeping with the mega-scope of the biblical epic, this collector's edition offers four discs with 10 hours of extras, including a smart documentary and the 1925 silent version of the pic, making its DVD debut.

advertisement ▼

When MGM's film bowed in 1959, comic Mort Sahl famously wisecracked, "Loved him, hated Hur." That dichotomy has followed the film over the years, with fans proclaiming it one of the pinnacles of Hollywood filmmaking, and detractors rolling their eyes at its oversized style mixed with an old-fashioned sensibility.

Even the film's detractors may be converted after listening to the info in the DVD's docus. "Ben-Hur: The Epic That Challenged Cinema," produced and directed by Gary Leva, offers folks like [George Lucas](#), [Ridley Scott](#), [Arnon Milchan](#) and [Michael Douglas](#) talking about the film's influence on pics as diverse as "Bullitt," "The Matrix," "Star Wars," "Gladiator" and "The Aviator."

Each of the doc's 10 chapters tackles a different area of study. Cinematographers [Janusz Kaminski](#) and Ernest Dickerson talk about "Ben-Hur's" composition and lighting; sound man Ben Burt praises the audio effects (and lack of music) in the chariot race. In one of the more interesting segments, production designers Anthony Pratt and Arthur Max weigh the virtues of matte paintings vs. CGI vs. actual sets.

Editor Joel Cox, director Frasier Heston and d.p. [Caleb Deschanel](#) offer insights as the doc intercuts the chariot race with the pod-racer sequence from "Star Wars: Episode I -- The Phantom Menace."

Fourth disc includes another good hourlong film that was included in the 2001 DVD, the 1993 Turner Entertainment docu "Ben-Hur: The Making of an Epic," produced and directed by Scott Benson and written/co-produced by May Adair Kaiser. The film provides an overview of "Ben-Hur," from the 1880 book by General Lew Wallace, through an early stage version (the chariot race featured horses running on treadmills), the silent pic and the making of the 1959 version, concluding with its then-record-setting 11 Oscar wins.

Footage from the April 4, 1960, kudocast is choppily edited, with winners mysteriously appearing out of nowhere to grab their trophy. Still, the segment is a lot of fun. Even hardcore movie buffs may have a tough time identifying some of those presenters, but it's easy to see

DVD Reviews From the Same Period

[The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy](#)
9/11/05 6:00am

[Lost: The Complete First Season](#)
9/11/05 6:00am

[Crash](#) 9/11/05 6:00am

[Lilo & Stitch 2](#) 8/29/05 3:43pm

[Downfall](#) 8/28/05 6:00am

[Platform](#) 8/28/05 6:00am

[Roseanne: The Complete First Season](#)
8/28/05 6:00am

[The Complete Thin Man Collection](#)
8/14/05 6:00am

[The Dick Cavett Show: Rock Icons](#)
8/14/05 6:00am

[Undeclared](#) 8/14/05 6:00am

[The Muppet Show: Season One](#) 8/14/05
6:00am

[Alexander Director's Cut](#) 7/31/05
6:00am

Current Reviews...

Film Jobs

Executive Director, Durham, NC
Full Frame Documentary Film Festival

Assistant, Santa Monica, CA

LATEST NEWS

- [News](#)
- [Variety Vision](#)
- [Columns](#)
- [Reviews](#)
- [Box Office](#)
- [Hot Topics](#)
- [ELIZABETHTOWN](#)
IN THEATERS OCTOBER 14
[VISIT THE OFFICIAL SITE](#)

SPECIAL REPORTS

- [Awards](#)
- [Festivals](#)
- [Markets](#)
- [Other Reports](#)
- [Editorial Calendar](#)
- [Submit Listings](#)

BLOGS

- [The Stylephile](#)
- [Kaiju Shakedown](#)
- [Bags and Boards](#)
- [EEG News](#)

SECTIONS

- [Discussion Boards](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [People](#)
- [VPage Photos](#)

TOOLS

- [VarietyCareers](#)
- [Search Archives](#)
- [Search The Vault](#)
- [Browse by Date](#)
- [Showbiz Calendar](#)
- [Language](#)
- [RSS feeds](#)
- [Handheld Access](#)

CHARTS AND DATA

- [TV Production](#)
- [Film Production](#)
- [Additional Charts and Data](#)

RESOURCE GUIDES

- [Hi-Def](#)
- [Visual FX](#)

RELATED SITES

- [V Life](#)
- [VLife Weekend](#)

JAGUAR

THE GORGEOUS 100
THE BEST OF AWARDS FASHION

For Variety's Centennial, Variety.com presents its list of the top 100 gorgeous awards fashions. Come back each week as we count down our picks for the most impressive celebrity awards appearances.

100. MADONNA
99. JULIETTE BINOCHE
98. WINONA RYDER
97. NAOMI WATTS
96. DIANE LANE
95. UMA THURMAN
94. JULIE CHRISTIE
93. PATRICIA CLARKSON
92. JENNIFER LOPEZ
91. PENELOPE CRUZ

> SEE ICONIC MOMENTS IN CINEMA
> WONDERFUL MOMENTS IN FILM MUSIC



All of our choices had to first satisfy the criteria of "Is it gorgeous?" Our selections reflect the person, the moment, their history, and their style at the Academy Awards.

Don't agree with our choices? Tell us what you think at [Variety Discussions](#).

JAGUAR

- [Broadcasting & Cable](#)
- [Multichannel News](#)
- [Video Business](#)
- [DVD Exclusive](#)
- [LA 411](#)

why kudocasts were shorter in those days. Most acceptance speeches consist of one sentence ("My humble thanks to everybody!"); accepting as best director, Wyler was one of the longest-winded winners, with a 13-second speech.

Also entertaining are the trailers from the era, which exclaim flatly that this is "the finest motion picture achievement in screen history!" and "the entertainment experience of a lifetime!" It's a reminder that studios always revved up the hype, but once did it without the benefit of online blurbmeisters.

There is also a "Ben-Hur collector's edition with Bible Study Guide," written by Rev. Robert H. Schuller and his son Rev. Robert A. Schuller, co-chairmen of Crystal Cathedral Ministries. The special edition will be available at DVD stores and Christian retail stores.

The film looks terrific, in a newly remastered print from the original 65mm film elements. Also included are a new audio commentary by film historian T. Gene Hatcher (interspersed with vintage comments from Heston); screen tests, including Leslie Nielsen's; and newsreels.

The silent version, restored by Thames Television and with a score by Carl Davis, is new to DVD, though the Fred Niblo-helmed version had been released on VHS. This silent film merits its own extras; there are none here. Maybe they're waiting for the deluxe super-bonus-special-collector's six-disc version someday.

Meltemi Productions, Inc.

Production Manager, Reno, NV
KRRV-TV

[More film jobs](#)

powered by [VARIETY CAREERS.COM](#)

BOX OFFICE TOP TEN

Sponsored by:

Weekly: Sep. 23 - 29, 2005 * in millions

1	Flightplan	\$31.1	6	Lord of War	\$6.8
2	Tim Burton's Corpse Bride	\$22.6	7	The 40 Year Old Virgin	\$5.7
3	Just Like Heaven	\$12.1	8	The Constant Gardener	\$3.1
4	The Exorcism of Emily Rose	\$9.3	9	The Transporter 2	\$2.9
5	Roll Bounce	\$8.6	10	Cry Wolf	\$2.7

[view full chart](#)

[view box office news](#)

Variety is striving to present the most thorough review database. To report inaccuracies in review credits, please [click here](#). We do not currently list below-the-line credits, although we hope to include them in the future. Please note we may not respond to every suggestion. Your assistance is appreciated.

Date in print: Mon., Sep. 12, 2005, [Weekly](#)



[Back to top](#)

[About](#) [Advertise](#) [Contact Us](#) [Help](#) [Link to Us](#) [Site Index](#) [Subscribe](#)

XML

[Variety news and reviews delivered by RSS feed](#)

© 2005 [Reed Business Information](#), a division of [Reed Elsevier Inc.](#)
All rights reserved. Use of this web site is subject to its
[Terms and Conditions of Use](#). View our [Privacy Policy](#).

[Make Variety.com Your Home Page](#)