

DVD

What's up with Streisand?

By Randy A. Salas
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Barbra is back in the "Barbra Streisand Collection." The four-disc set (Warner, \$69.92; \$19.98 each) contains "What's Up, Doc?" and three movies whose biggest fault is that they aren't that charming 1972 film.

Howard Hawks' classic "Bringing Up Baby," starring Katharine Hepburn, was the primary inspiration for "What's Up, Doc?" — which starred

Streisand as a happy-go-lucky know-it-all who intrudes on the ordered life of a musicologist played by Ryan O'Neal. Mixed-up identical luggage and inspired wordplay leave the wackiness, as does Madeline Kahn, playing O'Neal's prim fiancée in her feature-film debut.

In addition to admiring the clever script, whose writers included Buck Henry, director Peter Bogdanovich regularly cites the influence of screwball comedies of yesteryear in an easygoing, feature-length commentary on the DVD. The cinematic connection is even more pronounced in a silly behind-the-scenes featurette made when the movie came out, "Screwball Comedies — Remember Them?" Bogdanovich hams it up with the stars, introducing Streisand as the star of "Funny Face." (She starred in "Funny Girl.")

Streisand provides commentary on the DVD but only for specific scenes, less than 15 minutes. It's just as well, because she adds little. She also comments to varying degrees on the discs for the other movies: 1972's bizarre "Up the Sandbox," in which she plays a day-dreaming housewife; her disappointing reteaming with O'Neal in the 1979 boxing movie "The Main Event," and the best of the rest, the 1987 courtroom drama "Nuts." Director Irvin Kershner ("The Empire Strikes Back") elevates "Up the Sandbox" with his feature-length commentary.

The movies are presented widescreen, with the 31-year-old "What's Up, Doc?" looking particularly fine for its age.

FRENCH CONNECTION

French director Luc Besson's sharp breakthrough film, "La Femme Nikita," is out in its third DVD incarnation — this time as a special edition (MGM, \$24.98) with newly produced extras that don't live up to their billing.

In a decent 20-minute retrospective, star Anne Parillaud recalls that Besson laboriously shot 82 takes of her first scene — and used the second in the film. Composer Eric Serra and others discuss his innovative electronic score in a five-minute segment. But an "interactive map" contains only three 30-second snippets about the making of the film (a hidden "easter egg" offers one more), and the generously labeled "poster gallery" contains exactly two images.

Absent from the entire affair is Besson.

It's obvious that the movie disc was re-released to piggyback on the DVD debut of the cult-hit TV series based on the movie. "La Femme Nikita: The Complete First Season" (Warner, \$99.98)

Barbra Streisand and Ryan O'Neal created sparks in the 1972 screwball comedy "What's Up, Doc?"

Warner Home Video

contains 22 episodes on six discs with a making-of featurette, deleted scenes and commentary on a few episodes. The show found its legs when it stopped merely aping the movie, something that co-creators Robert Cochran and Joel Surnow say became inevitable as the 1997 season progressed.

EN GARDE!

"I'm proud to say this is the best fencing picture ever made," actor Mel Ferrer unabashedly proclaims in a recent interview on the DVD for the awesome swashbuckler "Scaramouche," one of four 1950s sword-wielding classics now out (Warner, \$19.98 each).

Ferrer, 85, says he knew nothing about sword-fighting before doing the film, but he did know dancing. So the fencing master gave a number to each move, and Ferrer learned to duel with co-star Stewart Granger as if it were choreography. The results were spectacular.

"We insisted on doing our own stunts — and it almost killed both

of us," Ferrer says, noting a time when Granger didn't duck low enough and Ferrer lopped off some of his co-star's hair.

An essay on the disc highlights great swordplay in movies, citing the new "Die Another Day" but omitting the two best recent sword flicks, "The Count of Monte Cristo" and "The Mask of Zorro."

"Knights of the Round Table," the only widescreen movie in the batch, includes an intro by Ferrer and fluffy news footage from the movie's premiere. "The Master of Ballantrae" has the exciting addition of trailers for star Errol Flynn's better films "The Adventures of Robin Hood" (coming Sept. 30 in a two-disc set) and "Sea Hawk" and "Captain Blood" (not far behind, I hope). The rousing "The Crimson Pirate" includes a short essay on star Burt Lancaster and his frequent movie teamings with boyhood friend and fellow acrobat Nick Cravat, who's a stitch as the sidekick in this film.

Randy A. Salas is at rasalas@startribune.com.

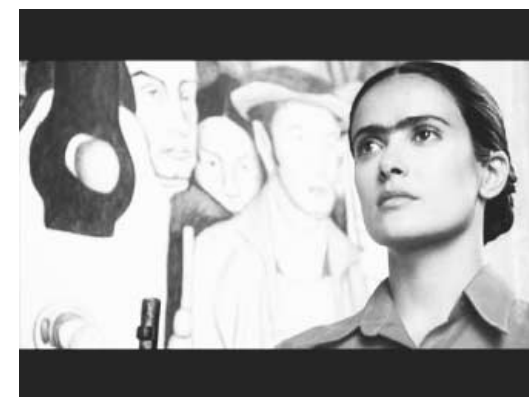


WIDESCREEN 101

LESSON 2: WHY ARE SOME FILMS 'WIDER'?

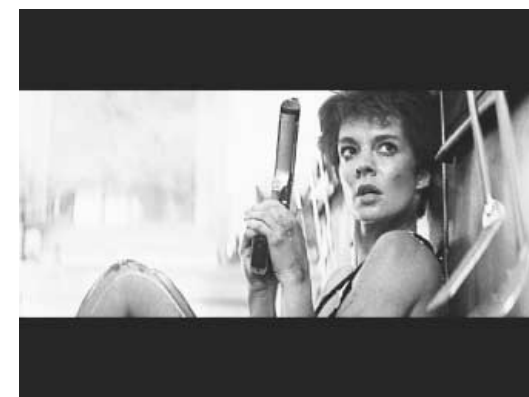
Widescreen movies come in different sizes. It's not obvious on a giant theater screen, but it's readily apparent on a regular TV set.

The dimensions of a movie's image are expressed as a ratio of width to height — its aspect ratio. For widescreen presentations, the two most common are:



Buena Vista Home Entertainment

1.85:1 — the image is 1.85 times wider than it is tall, as shown by a scene from "Frida" on a regular 4:3 TV screen.



MGM Home Entertainment

2.35:1 — the image is 2.35 times wider than it is tall, as shown by a scene from "La Femme Nikita." Even though this image would have been bigger in a theater, it appears smaller on a regular TV because of the screen's fixed dimensions.

There have been other widescreen aspect ratios throughout cinema history, including the 1.66:1 of British films and some of today's animated films.

Further exploration: The Internet's Widescreen Museum (<http://www.widescreenmuseum.com>).

Randy A. Salas

SLACKERS from E1

Even some lower-tech tools have gained sophistication

Psychologists call these games "impression management," a field whose rules have been transformed now that so many people communicate through technology rather than a handshake and a conversation. In some ways, the e-mail that arrives at 11 p.m. is the definitive modern sign of a dedicated worker.

But others see all this as yet another legitimate technology that has been hijacked by people with skewed ethics. "You're out playing golf, and you look like you've spent four hours in the office. . . . If everybody does that, the company goes bankrupt," says Stuart Gilman, director of the Ethics Resource Center in Washington, D.C.

Even some lower-tech tools, such as call forwarding, have grown more sophisticated, making it a snap to answer your desk phone from your son's soccer game or the pedicure chair. Services such as Yahoo By Phone also let you pick up your e-mail from afar, even without a hand-held gadget — a computerized voice named Jenni will read your messages aloud over the phone.

Wireless e-mail gadgets

such as the Palm Tungsten W and the BlackBerry also can be tinkered with to help cover the tracks of an office absence. E-mails sent from a BlackBerry, for example, automatically sign off with the phrase "Sent from my BlackBerry Handheld," a dead giveaway that you are out.

"It's the classic sign of a complete BlackBerry neophyte," says Alex Levine, co-founder of the text-message company Upoc in New York City. "The only reason to keep it on is to make people acutely aware that you're not at your desk."

Desk in the park

Levine has configured his BlackBerry so that messages he sends from it have the exact same format as those sent from his desktop e-mail; it has allowed him to set up his "desk" in New York City's Central Park.

Some companies say these new tools are dangerous because they play into employees' increasing willingness to fudge the truth about their work life. The case of former New York Times reporter Jayson Blair, who used e-mail and a cell phone to suggest he was

writing from locations that he didn't visit, is one example.

A recent ethics survey by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 59 percent of human-resources professionals said they personally observed employees lying about the number of hours they worked; some 53 percent reported that they saw employees lying to a supervisor, a jump of 8 percentage points in six years.

Still, some employers not only tolerate the technology, but use it themselves. "If you're a boss, and you send e-mails at all hours of the night, the subtle message you're sending employees is, 'I'm working — why aren't you?'" says Anne Warfield, a career coach in Edina. Skip Coghill, who runs a trucking company, does a lot more than send e-mails in the middle of the night. When he recently took a cruise off the coast of Acapulco, Mexico, many of his clients never knew he had left the office. Between casino visits and midnight buffet runs, Coghill used the GoToMyPC.com software to operate his office computer by remote control.

He could even spy on his employees from the deck of the ship: He brought up Global Positioning System maps that showed him the precise location of each of his trucks, down to the intersection. If an

employee was off-track, he could fire off a text message to the truck. "I was drinking a pina colada, sitting in my swimsuit, having a total ball," Coghill says.

Of course, not all managers pay much attention to things like what time an e-mail is sent or where it is sent from. Craig Prickett, a vice president at Charles Schwab in San Francisco, says he is more concerned about the work being complet-

ed than the time stamp on an e-mail. "I'm not thinking nothing's getting done here, but they sure work hard at 2 a.m.," Prickett says.

Die-hards see nothing wrong with any of this. "You don't have to actually lie," says Don Pavlish, host of DonsBossPage.com, a Web site for slackers. "You just let your e-mail program suggest you're working late."

But it is easy to get a little too comfortable with these new powers — and they can backfire. Wiskus, the Denver tech worker who manipulated his computer from a nearby diner so he could take three-hour lunches, says he was eventually fired for habitual lateness.

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rmiranda@startribune.com
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E-mail variety@startribune.com

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COMMENTS
Susie Hopper
Assistant Managing Editor/Features
shopper@startribune.com
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