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John Howard Reid

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Silent Films & Early Talkies on DVD

*A Classic Movie Fan's Guide
by John Howard Reid*



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Silent Films Early Talkies on DVD: A Classic Movie Fan's Guide

John Howard Reid : Silent Films Early Talkies on DVD: A Classic Movie Fan's Guide before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Silent Films Early Talkies on DVD: A Classic Movie Fan's Guide:

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review helpful. Essential, but with a few flaws

By calvinme

The problem with any DVD catalog is that it ages quickly, with new releases coming out all of the time. However, for the fan of the silents and early talkies, this is a one of a kind find. The author has listed many films, both the well known and obscure, listed a synopsis and some interesting background information on the film, stars, and directors, and even included reproductions of old movie posters. Best of all, the author tells you where you can find these films on DVD, and the quality of the reproduction. The manufacturers are not limited to just the major studios, Kino, and Criterion. He also includes such vendors as Grapevine Video, which has been selling silents for over thirty years. In the back is listed those online vendors that the author considers to be reputable, which is very good information. Now for my minor complaints. The author will have articles for films that, at the time this catalog was printed, have no DVD release at all. For example, he goes into great detail about Borzage's "Bad Girl", which is a great film, even though at the end of the article he mentions - correctly at the time - that there is no DVD release. However, even though the author says that vintagefilmbuff is a reliable DVD vendor, he doesn't mention any of the DVD's of the silent/early talkie era that this company has available. vintagefilmbuff has many of the early Paramount talkies on DVD-R at pretty good quality. For example, 1929's "The Virginian" is available from vintagefilmbuff. There are other films that deserved mention that were omitted, such as 1929's "It's A Great Life" and "Lights of New York", the first all-talking picture. However, I still recommend it as a buyer's guide and just an all-around interesting read to those of us fascinated with the films of this much ignored era in Hollywood history.

Around 500 movies from the silent and early talkie era are now available on DVD. Of course this figure includes shorts as well as features, plus 40 or 50 films that are available in multiple versions. This handbook, sub-titled "A Classic Movie Fan's Guide", provides detailed reviews of 178 of these movies, plus less comprehensive information on over 100 additional titles, dating from 1918 through 1933, that are now available to purchase in DVD format from various suppliers. (A few highly recommended firms are listed in the book). Almost all the films reviewed are full-length features that showcase stars like Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Clara Bow, Lon Chaney, Louise Brooks, Charles Chaplin, Joan Crawford, Colleen Moore, Harold Lloyd, Gary Cooper, William Powell, Greta Garbo, Rudolph Valentino, Norma Shearer, Buster Keaton, Shirley Temple, Barbara Stanwyck, Ronald Colman, Lillian Gish, Marion Davies, and Wallace Beery, who are still top favorites with all motion picture fans. In addition, however, it's very pleasing to note that players like Laura La Plante, Charles Ray, Alice Terry, Pola Negri, Mary Miles Minter, Rod La Rocque, and Mabel Poulton are also featured on a large number of DVD discs. These stars were extraordinarily popular in their day and are just waiting to be re-discovered by today's movie lovers. Current release information is provided for each film. And the DVD itself is rated for quality on a scale of one to ten. Purchasers will save the price of this book by following just one or two of the author's recommendations. It's disappointing to buy a DVD and then find the picture and/or sound quality is so poor that the movie cannot be enjoyed. A further bonus is that the book has been illustrated with over 110 beautiful black-and-white photos from the Pattison Gallery of vintage movie stills, one of the best and largest private collections in the world.