



« You and the life and the music ... let's hear it | Main

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## Remastered 'Days' subtle, worthwhile

Two months ago I talked to Criterion technical director Lee Kline about the remastered DVD release of “Days of Heaven,” Terrence Malick’s 1978 drama photographed by Nestor Almendros and an uncredited Haskell Wexler. According to Kline, Malick’s supervision of the Criterion transfer involved a distinct, even radical desaturation of the honeyed turn-of-the-century imagery. Last week the DVD went on sale, and what it is a glory to behold, the rumors of a major visual reassessment on Malick’s behalf have been exaggerated.

The color spectrum is subtly more distinct and discrete now, and the images are pristine; there is more detail in the faces, as well as in the Canadian wheat fields at sunset than before. (**Check [dvdbeaver.com](http://dvdbeaver.com) for side-by-side comparisons of the Criterion edition to the 1999 Paramount reissue.**) But you need very good equipment—better than mine, at least—to detect a significant change in the viewing experience.

That said, the Criterion edition’s excellent. While the first 40 minutes of Malick’s “The New World” contains his finest work as a visual poet, working intuitively, “Days of Heaven” remains his most satisfying and complete achievement. It is a paradox, a small story containing visual multitudes.

### Now that’s a tune-a!:

On the new Warner Bros. three-disc DVD edition of “The Jazz Singer” (1927), one of the many felicitous extras is the great 1936 Tex Avery cartoon “I Love to Sing-a,” which has been referenced over the decades by everything from “South Park” to “Happy Feet.” Under the Merrie Melodies banner, Avery’s short managed to retell the story of the landmark Al Jolson feature—landmark, with an asterisk; see below—in just a few perfect minutes.

The title song comes from a Jolson vehicle released in ’36, “The Singing Kid,” and you’ve never heard it, well, the Harold Arlen/Yip Harburg tune is “reet.” It’s ha-cha, a pip. Once you hear it, you will not get it out of your head, ever. (It’s also on [youtube.com](http://youtube.com).) “I love to sing-a/About the moon-a and the June-a and the spring-a...About a sky of blue-a/Or a tea for two-a...”

Now, about that asterisk. One of the most valuable aspects of this “Jazz Singer” DVD package is everything around the feature itself. The extras include a 1926 Vitaphone short (very early sound) starring Jolson, “A Plantation Act,” which finds Jolson in blackface doing what helped make him famous. “You ain’t heard nuthin’ yet,” he se

in between numbers, twice. He'd been saying that line for years. So much for the legend that Jolson let it go spontaneously during a sound sequence heard 'round t world in "The Jazz Singer."

I don't have to tell you that Jolson's blackface routine, from more than one angle, is not easy to watch. But as a historical document "A Plantation Act" is riveting. And taken with some of the other Vitaphone shorts in this package, it's a piece of American show business history, inglorious and eternal. Have you ever seen "Lambchops"? Patronizing, sexist dumb-broad humor, nothing too interesting on th page. But it is performed by George Burns and Gracie Allen, who lend such astounding comic delicacy to their material, watching it is like visiting vaudeville heaven.