

DVD

# Teen comedies go totally '80s

By John Beifuss  
Scripps Howard News Service

Remember in the 1980s, when high school boys liked to wear jackets with the collars turned up and the sleeves pushed up past their elbows, like Michael Jackson?

Me neither, but it must have happened, at least at Hollywood High, because that's how all the male heroes dress at some point during "Valley Girl" and "The Sure Thing" (MGM, \$19.98 each) and "The Last American Virgin" (MGM, \$14.95), three totally 1980s movies new to DVD.

The movies are interesting time capsules of '80s teen behavior (everybody still plays vinyl records), fashion (disco-New Wave-preppy-metal) and attitudes (post-Bluto, pre-Tom Green). They also represent the last gasp of an era when low-budget commercial filmmaking offered legitimate competition to big-budget studio "event" films.

The energetic "Valley Girl," shot by director Martha Coolidge for \$350,000, remains the freshest of the three, with a "to thine own self be true" message.

A 22-minute retrospective on the DVD gathers most of the major players, including Nicolas Cage, now an A-list actor — but not the actual "Valley Girl," Deborah Foreman. Cage and Coolidge reminisce on their own in an 18-minute segment. There's also a video commentary, an audio commentary by Coolidge, a trivia track and a smart look at the movie's way cool music.

"The Sure Thing," director Rob Reiner's followup to "This Is Spinal Tap," is a charming romantic comedy carried over some too-slick patches by its 17-year-old lead, John Cusack. Reiner adds fun commentary, and there's a trivia track and 45 minutes' worth of background featurettes.

"Virgin," directed by Boaz Davidson, begins as a typically crude teen sex comedy before reaching a surprising downbeat conclusion



John Cusack is the moody, jacket-wearing star of the '80s film "The Sure Thing."

MGM Home Entertainment

that makes it the most honest film of this trilogy. The lack of extras — just a trailer — justifies the lower price.

All of the discs present the movies in their original widescreen format and also include a modified full-screen version.

### CHECKMATE!

A real find is 1927's "The Chess Player" (Milestone, \$29.99), a haunting, clever silent French drama from director Raymond Bernard.

Film historian Kevin Brownlow had praised the imagination and power of the director's historic dramas and lamented their neglect over the years in his landmark book on silent films, "The Parade's Gone By." Now, Brownlow has restored "The Chess Player," and the result is as beautiful as it is fascinating.

"The restoration involved many archives from around Europe," said Dennis Doros of Milestone Film & Video, which released the DVD.

Set in Russian-occupied Poland in 1776, the film revolves around nobleman Boleslas Vorowowski, a remarkable chess player who also is leading a secret liberation movement against the Russians. His mentor is an eccentric baron who creates automatons in his basement.

After Boleslas is wounded in battle and is wanted by the Russians, the baron hides him in an elaborate chess-playing automaton in hopes of smuggling him to Germany. But when Catherine the Great summons the baron and his mechanical chess player for a game at her palace in St. Petersburg, Boleslas' fate hangs in the balance.

"The revenge of the automatons at the end of the film remains one of the most atmospheric and unusual scenes in movie history — comparable even to Lon Chaney's 'Phantom of the Opera,'" Doros said. "But it is Bernard's direction and the emotional and epic sweep that makes the film one of the highlights of European cinema."

The DVD also features revelatory interviews, stills and other historical information.

### SERIAL ADVENTURES

Two of Republic's best-loved serials, 1952's "Radar Men From the Moon" and 1939's "Zorro's Fighting Legion" (Image, \$29.99 each) have just come out on DVD. The latter is a rip-roaring adventure starring a perfectly cast Reed Hadley as the famous Mr. Z. This time around, Zorro must stop the reincarnated Yaqui god Don Del Oro from stealing gold needed to fund Juarez's new government. And in the delightfully cheesy "Radar Men," Commander Cody (George Wallace) must stop an evil moon leader named Retik from invading Earth. Look for Clayton Moore, better known as "The Lone Ranger," in a rare bad-guy role.

Staff writer Randy A. Salas contributed to this report. Includes material from Susan King of the Los Angeles Times.

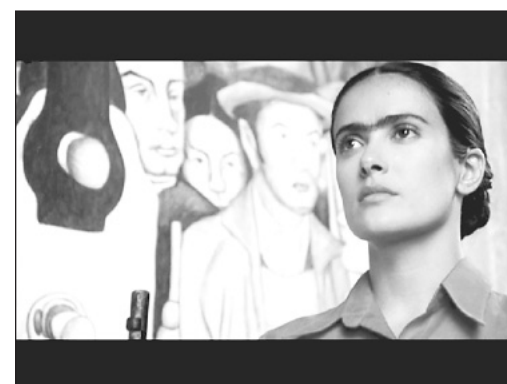
## WIDESCREEN 101

### LESSON 5: WHAT IS 'ANAMORPHIC'?

Most widescreen DVDs produced today note on the packaging that the movie is "anamorphic" or that it has been "enhanced" for display on widescreen TV sets. But what does that really mean?



In its raw form, an anamorphic widescreen image would fill a regular TV screen (1.33:1 ratio) with no or little black space above and below the image. Everything would look stretched vertically — as illustrated by this scene from "Frida," starring Salma Hayek — because an anamorphic DVD has extra horizontal lines of resolution.



Viewers don't notice this because by default a DVD player takes the anamorphic output and adds black space above and below the picture to re-create the widescreen image in its proper aspect ratio (1.85:1 in the case of "Frida"). On a regular no-frills TV set, the end result is a widescreen image that essentially looks the same whether it's anamorphic or not.

Many newer regular TV sets have an anamorphic function. The TV can squeeze the image to its proper proportions (instead of the DVD player). The result is better picture quality. Widescreen TV sets rely on anamorphic DVDs to get the most out of their displays.

Randy A. Salas

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