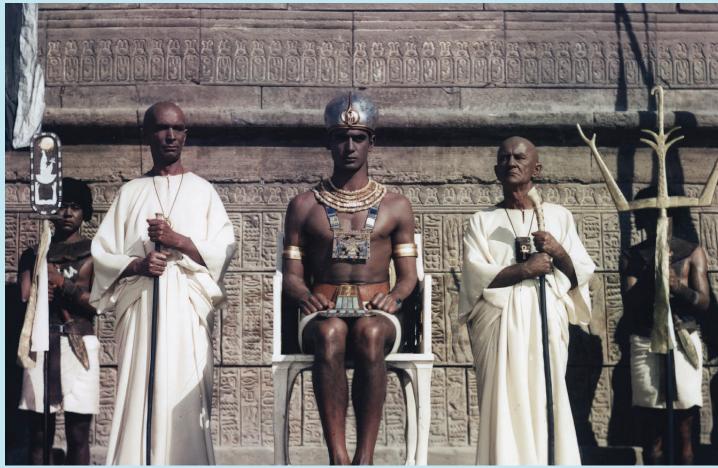
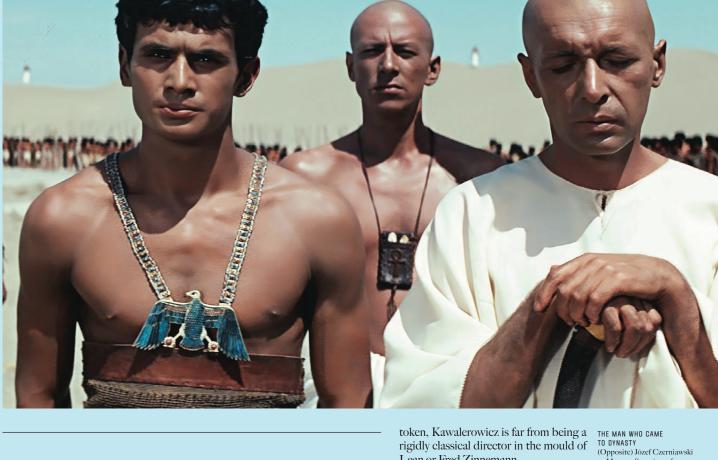
BLU-RAY





Pharaoh

Polish director Jerzy Kawalerowicz's drama of Ancient Egypt has an epic sweep to match Joseph Mankiewicz's Cleopatra, and a central performance as tortured and naturalistic as anything the stars of Method managed

REVIEWED BY ADRIAN MARTIN

Since the late 1990s, filmgoers have literally hundreds of obediently waiting become accustomed to seeing certain soldiers holding spears. The effect of this visual phenomena conjured by CGI spectacular (if seemingly offhand) mise en (computer-generated imagery) – and only scène is certainly impressive, yet it is not very approximately or sketchily staged exactly the type of vast, lyrical grandeur within the real, physical space in front we know from adventure classics like of a movie camera. High in this genre of David Lean's Lawrence of Arabia (1962). fabricated apparition come crowd shots: The geometry of 'crowds and power' (to packs of hundreds of civilians in the street use the title of Elias Canetti's 1960 nonor soldiers on the battlefield.

to whichever epic TV event is currently up with CGI. streaming, the 'cut, multiply and paste' Indeed, *Pharaoh* can be regarded, in its forever through desert sands...

Jerzy Kawalerowicz's Polish super-

fiction book) as displayed here may be From Martin Scorsese's *Kundun* (1997) entirely real, but the mood is deliberately through Oliver Stone's Alexander (2004) colder and harsher than anything cooked

principle of crowd imagery is often time as now, as a veritable anti-Lawrence. painfully visible to the spectator's eye - The setting is Ancient Egypt, as young depending on how much of the budget Prince Ramses (Jerzy Zelnik) - a figure has been left for post-production finess- invented by Bolesław Prus for his globing. It's possible, in the worst instances, ally successful 1897 novel – prepares to in Uzbekistan). Music is sparsely laid femme fatale Kama (Barbara Brylska) – to pick out the tiny assembly of living take the place of his wise father (Andrzej on: the anguished sounds of howling although only a slender piece of transpar-critically lauded in its day, the film, in extras who have been coined into a dis-Girtler) and become Pharaoh Ramses winds or murmuring crowds remove us ent clothing differentiates these women all its big-budget splendour, had largely tant, ghostly horde. Once such serial pro- number XIII. Ramses' enemies, how- irrevocably from the gaudy ambience of in Kawalerowicz's depiction of their fallen out of circulation for many years. cedures became common to video game ever, are legion, since he opposes himself such 1950s Hollywood epics as Michael alluring charms. visualisation, it was only logical that to the priesthood - a gang of rather sinis- Curtiz's *The Egyptian* or Howard Hawks's unfolding - showing armies marching central palace is a stunning prophecy of the actions of one Donald Trump!

Step by step, the film calmly traces production *Pharaoh*, however, hails from the moves and counter-moves of a comlightly resonant with the many real-life Within the context of Polish cinema desk, delivers to camera a highly informaa proudly pre-digital moment in cinema plicated power game. There are clanyouth rebellions of the 1960s. Dark-history, Kawalerowicz (Mother Joan of tive rundown of the various historical - the painstaking preproduction began destine agreements, formal inquiries, skinned, forever brooding, tragic hubris the Angels, 1961) is a formidable but also and cultural contexts that feed into Pharin 1962, and it was theatrically released and the accounting of dazzling gold running high, he is unafraid to scandalise reasonably official, mainstream figure. aoh - including its provocative allusion to in 1966. We are scarcely beyond the reserves deep inside the palace labyrinth. his imperious queen mother (Wiesława Nobody could mistake the high style of the continuing influence of the Catholic opening credits when Jerzy Wojcik's Kawalerowicz is careful to break up the Mazurkiewicz), or follow the urgings of *Pharaoh* for anything that, say, Jerzy Skoli- Church over 60s Poland. More disc pro-CinemaScope camera takes the opportuscenes set in oppressive interior spaces his libido with the faithful, pious Jewess' mowski was merrily inventing on the ducers should use this straightforwardly nity to track ahead of a running man for with sometimes cruel bouts of action Sarah (Krystyna Mikołajewska) and, sub-cheap during that same period in Walko-academic lecture format and drop the

they seem more authentic.

There is a remarkable scene in which Ramses,

in torment and at odds with his various

advisers, begins to twist and contort his limbs

- and Zelnik's intense performance resembles

nothing so much as James Dean in Rebel

Without a Cause, to the point where you expect

him to cry out: 'You're tearing me apart!'

conceptual art pieces (such as those by ter, secretive and strikingly bald-headed Land of the Pharaohs. In an intriguing para-Ramses, in torment and at odds with in 1955 and presided over until his death the Australian artist Baden Pailthorpe) characters who wield enormous social dox of cinema's powers of historical recre- his various advisers, begins to twist and in 2007 - has previously been available would tinker with and exaggerate this power. In fact, their ability to manipulate ation, as certain recurring details (such as contort his limbs – and Zelnik's intense to English-speaking audiences only on mechanical, unreal, potentially infinite the mass population into storming the the elaborate headdresses of women and performance resembles nothing so much Volume 1 of Scorsese's Masterpieces of Polish men alike) get weirder and more surreal, as James Dean in Rebel Without a Cause Cinema box-set in 2014. (1955), to the point where you expect him Ramses XIII is a captivating antihero, to cry out: "You're tearing me apart!"

almost a full minute - casually passing out on the desert sands (filmed mainly sequently, the more slippery Phoenician ver (1965) or Barrier (1966). By the same often stilted interview an expert device.

Lean or Fred Zinnemann.

Doubtless taking a cue from the aesthetics of the ancient Egyptian art that is generously displayed in the magnificent sets (built in a Łódź studio), Kawalerow- prophet Pentuer. icz aims for a frequently frontal, 'presentational' effect - complete with many looks directly into the camera. Even the camera movements follow a rigorous, geometrical logic, performing sudden sharp turns and whip pans. There is an affinity here with the pictorial styles developed by Sergei Parajanov and Miklós Jancsó during the 60s and 70s.

This standalone release of *Pharaoh* by Second Run is an event to be celebrated. Although commercially successful and The beautiful restoration by Studio There is a remarkable scene in which Kadr - which Kawalerowicz founded

In a splendid, 68-minute video 'afterword', Michał Oleszczyk, seated behind a as Mentesufis, priest of Amon, Jerzy Zelnik as Ramses XIII, Stanisław Milski (above) Zelnik as Ramses

Jerzy Kawalerowicz: Poland 1066: Second Run; region-free Blu-ray in Polish with English subtitles; Certificate 12; 152 minutes; 2.66:1 Extras: video lecture by critic Michał Oleszczyk; booklet.