It wasn’t that BLUE VELVET was completely original when it opened in 1986, with the influences of ’50s melodrama, Kenneth Anger, Luis Buñuel and film noir as blatantly visible in the film as dark roots under bleached hair. What BLUE VELVET did was announce a true original: David Lynch, an artist whose dark fantasies and imitable style exploded off the screen in his fourth feature and made him a household name against all odds.

The evolution of Lynch the director has yielded some of the most fascinating, narrative-defying puzzles in film and television, cinema so compelling and handsome that the most mainstream audiences will obsess over the inexplicable lengths of Lynch’s dream logic. In that respect, revisiting BLUE VELVET can sometimes feel like flipping through a loved one’s baby pictures, in that the film has a straightforward plot and an easy-to-discern level of reality. You’ll even squeal in delight over the first emergences of Lynch signatures (“Look, a forlorn chanteuse in front of a bright red curtain!”), but has anyone’s baby photos ever been this unforgettably gorgeous and haunting?

BLUE VELVET was a visual feast even on DVD, and is stunningly beautiful on the new Blu-ray.

Some high-definition transfers of older films reveal previously undetectable technical flaws, but any film lover who watches this new director-approved 2.35:1 transfer will be stunned by the detail and saturation in just the opening curtain. By the time the camera crawls through the grass of the Beaumonts’ lawn and reveals a cabal of carnivorous beetles, you’ll be left breathless by the sheer quality of this transfer’s visuals.

If you’ve never seen BLUE VELVET, this new disc is absolutely the next movie purchase you should make. The story of curious white-bread college boy Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) unraveling a mystery in his seemingly idyllic hometown begins with a severed human ear, and leads to desperate local club singer Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini) and her dangerous relationship to the town’s seedy criminal underbelly, as represented by Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper). BLUE VELVET launched Rossellini’s acting career, and the then newly sober Hopper redefined himself with an unhinged, iconic performance. While all the acting in BLUE VELVET is topnotch (including MacLachlan, a young Laura Dern and colorful character turns from Dean Stockwell, Brad Dourif and Lynch mainstay Jack Nance), the real star of BLUE VELVET was always David Lynch. The movie’s not horror, but there’s good reason so many horror fans love it; when Lynch embraces the animalistic ugliness of human depravity, there are few filmmakers more capable of inducing nightmares. BLUE VELVET has the added bonus of genuine suspense and tension (from heart-stopping beginning to cringe-inducing end, few scenes in popular cinema have inspired the stomach-dropping dread of Jeffrey’s second visit to Dorothy’s apartment), and the director’s emphasis on sound design, coupled with the deep shadows and color saturation of Frederick Elmes’ cinematography, help a 25-year-old low-budget film feel as glossy and contemporary as anything released last year.

The real reason BLUE VELVET on Blu-ray had fans excited is its near-hour of deleted scenes, refugees from a purported three-hour cut that has had Lynch-o-philes whispering and wishing for decades. So another treasure chest has been unearthed, though the movie itself is so singular and palpable that the deleted scenes play less as revelations than as tantalizing what-ifs. We see the inside of the bar where Frank procures his Pabst Blue Ribbon, complete with an old bluesman and topless female extras (including one who pulls off an unrecommendable party trick). There are extra tidbits of typically wacko Lynchian humor, such as Dorothy’s opening acts at the Slow Club, including a spot-lit dog eating from a bowl while “Glory Glory Hallelejuah” plays off-tempo from backstage.

The biggest and most severe changes among this material come from the repurposing of BLUE VELVET’s protagonist. In the finished film, Jeffrey seems eccentric only in contrast to the small-town high-school kids he appears to have outgrown, wearing hipster black and driving around a classic boat of a car. There’s a laugh in the film when Sandy, Dern’s naive high-school senior, regards Jeffrey as a bad-boy type, while in reality he appears to carry all the danger of a berry in vanilla yogurt. The deleted scenes recontextualize Jeffrey as disturbed

and obsessive long before he falls in with Dorothy and Frank. At a co-ed mixer that would have been his introduction, Jeffrey secretly watches an attempted sexual assault with fascination, not intervening until his cover is blown. The newly found footage depicts a failed relationship (to Megan Mullally, of all people!) and tense home life for Jeffrey, breaking the squeaky-clean suburban veneer set up by the opening scene. It would all make dramatic sense in the movie, showing a frustrated Jeffrey finding an outlet for his established darker impulses in a character arc that parallels Dorothy’s. None of the cut scenes are bad, but they would have robbed the power from the final cut’s version of Jeffrey, the eager Boy Scout whose repressed inner darkness is drawn out by Dorothy and Frank.

The Blu-ray’s only disappointment is that the recovered footage is the lone new feature; an engaging retrospective documentary has been imported from MGM’s special-edition DVD, and little tidbits of Lynch interviews are culled from other sources (there’s also a grand total of four outtakes that ultimately amount to watching actors giggle). Also included: the charming-in-hindsight AT THE MOVIES episode featuring future Lynch fan Roger Ebert furiously deriding BLUE VELVET as utter garbage. At the time, Ebert raged against the immorality of Lynch drenching his depictions of violence and degradation in irony. Even knowing that Ebert couldn’t have the foresight to predict the sheer lengths that films would eventually go to hide behind ironic distance, BLUE VELVET’s damaged characters come across today as painfully sincere in their obsessions.

The deleted scenes would have pushed an already heated film over the top, but the recovered content is still fascinating as a glimpse at how closely the vision of yesterday’s David Lynch lines up with the David Lynch of today. These moments from BLUE VELVET wouldn’t be completely out of place in LOST HIGHWAY or INLAND EMPIRE, which is meant less as an indictment of latter-day Lynch as a director spinning his wheels, and more of a laurel for his creation of BLUE VELVET with the confidence and clarity of a much older and more experienced filmmaker. The scenes were all wisely excised from the film (does anyone really wish for BLUE VELVET to be different?), but watching them now, seeing Lynch inching toward the fully developed beauty of MULHOLLAND DR. and his episodes of TWIN PEAKS, helps us all to feel like conspirators in this dark artist’s ascent.

MOVIE: 

BLU-RAY PACKAGE: 