

May 9, 2014

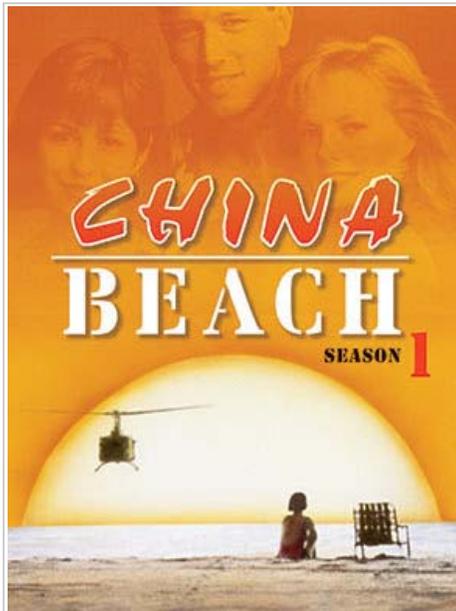
HUFF  
POST

ENTERTAINMENT

## DVD: *China Beach* Is Finally Available for Binge Viewing

Posted: 05/27/2013 6:10 pm

It seems like every TV show ever made is out on DVD or streaming on demand. But that's far from true. *China Beach* is the latest show fans have been eagerly anticipating to finally get the boxed set it deserves. But many more shows are still waiting. Where's all of *Hill Street Blues* and *I'll Fly Away* and *The Wonder Years* and *St. Elsewhere*, just to name a few? What shows are you dying to see released in full so you can watch it from beginning to end?



**CHINA BEACH THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$199.95 DVD; TimeLife) - Well, it took forever (blame the music) but when they finally did it, they did it right. Beloved cult drama *China Beach* is finally out in a gorgeous boxed set that includes all 62 episodes on 21 discs, along with hours and hours of reunions, bonus features, commentary tracks and more. It's all housed in an impressive and handsome box that's attractive but compact which fits easily alongside the other shows in your collection. For now, [the set is available directly from TimeLife](#) though eventually it will come to other outlets.

Why did it take so long? The songs. The show was bursting with pop music of the era and it's very hard to get clearances to

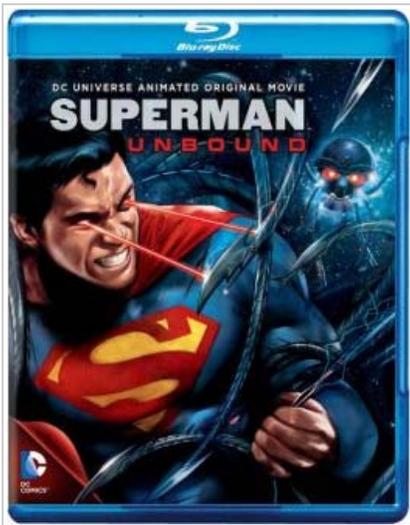
use them again on DVD. (Any music publisher/artist who demands exorbitant amounts is an idiot, by the way.) It's the same reason *The Wonder Years* is lost in limbo.

*China Beach* was sort of a serious spin on M\*A\*S\*H, the comedy set in Korea. It was an hour long drama that looked at the nurses and doctors and patients surrounding a MASH unit located near a great beach complete with lifeguard. The iconic opening scene showed Dana Delany looking very sexy as she sat out in the sun in a red bathing suit, only to have a helicopter zoom overhead and the audience realize she's a nurse in a war zone. The brief first season was earnest and awkward, due to unfortunate comic relief in a USO singer-wannabe. But John Wells (of *ER*) took the reins in season two and the show grew by leaps and bounds. The series would score three nominations for Best Drama and Delany would win Best Actress twice.

It was never close to a popular hit, which was all to the good. Like *St. Elsewhere*, it was a critics' darling that stayed under the radar and could do what it wanted. The show became increasingly bold, using complicated structures for some scenes, flash-forwards to life

after these soldiers returned home, documentary interviews with nurses and others interspersed with fictional scenes and even a cast visit to the Vietnam Memorial.

I haven't finished watching it yet but have the feeling they could have gone one more year to fully tackle the stateside lives of these veterans and Colleen McMurphy in particular. But there's a lot of TV here and they continued to get bolder and better and how many shows can say that?



**SUPERMAN UNBOUND** (\$24.99 BluRay;

Warner Bros.)

**STAR TREK THE NEXT GENERATION SEASON THREE** (\$129.99 BluRay; Paramount)

**DOCTOR WHO SEASON SEVEN PART TWO** (\$24.99 DVD; BBC)

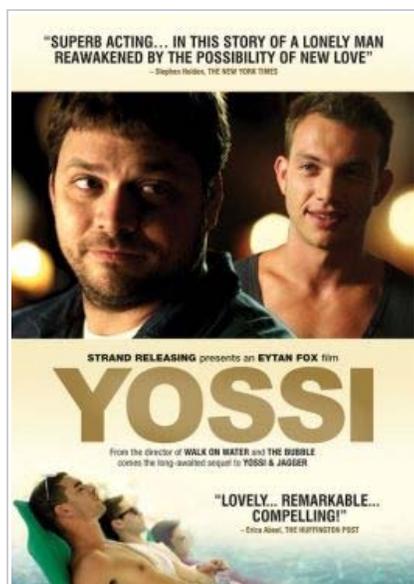
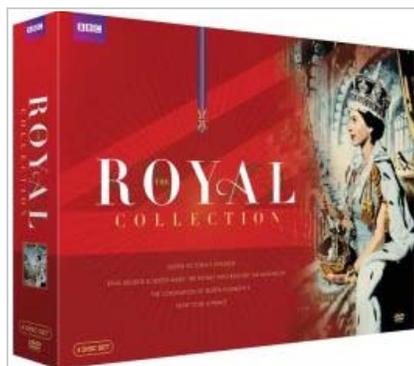
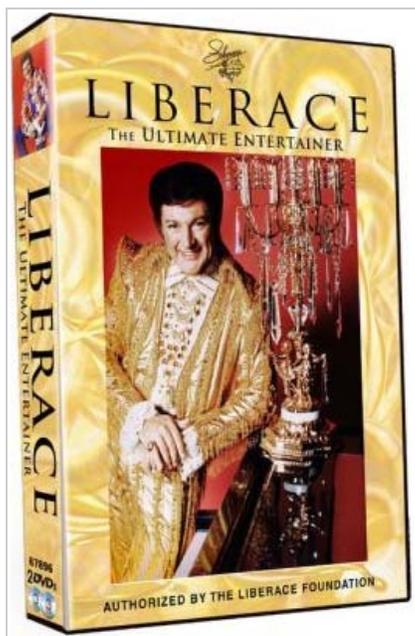
**DOCTOR WHO THE VISITATION** (\$34.99 DVD; BBC) -- The new Superman movie is great, you can tell your friends? What? You've seen Man Of Steel? No, you've seen the new animated movie Superman Unbound, with Matt Bomer voicing Superman as he and Supergirl battle the evil Braniac. It's brisk, fun, and if the new movie is this smart and enjoyable, we'll be very lucky indeed.

Certainly the new *Star Trek* movie is a disappointment. It's fine if you're a fan but it's not as good as the reboot and feels lazy with all the in-jokes, not to mention Tribbles, Khan, and a wholly unearned nod to veterans in the credits crawl. It's not a patch on season three of *Star Trek The Next Generation*, the season when the show escaped the shadow of the original series and hit true greatness. Frankly, it was never quite this good again, but

what a season, filled with Q and Data becoming more human and no more empath's (okay, just briefly) and the Borg at the finale. This season was remastered in-house so it's up to the standards of season one on BluRay. Of course, they're doing this all wrong. They should have released a boxed set in both BluRay and DVD for the entire series and then released individual seasons. As it is, this will be awfully pricey even on sale if you buy all seven seasons.

*Doctor Who* keeps chugging along nicely. Part 2 of Season 7 was certainly better than the tepid part one. But it's still not a patch on Season 6 which had a very ambitious season-long arc that built and built and built to a thunderous finale. Frankly, after that season, they need to keep doing season long arcs or the stand-alones will have to be tremendously good. They weren't even close in the first half, though the quality is better here. Nonetheless, the reveal of the origin of his Impossible Girl Clara barely withstood the season-long buildup. Thank God it was given a jolt at the end with a big reveal teasing the 90 minute special we'll be seeing in November to celebrate the 50th anniversary.

As for *The Visitation*, the arc from the Peter Davison years is like all the other BBC releases: filled with copious extras that are an embarrassment of riches. Davison just missed being my first Doctor (that was Tom Baker) but I like him from *All Creatures Great And Small* and he has an amiable air. Again and again, I say, release comprehensive boxed sets devoted to each Doctor. This parceling out of episodes is annoying and \$35 list for 95 minutes of television is absurd for a 30 year old collection of four episodes.



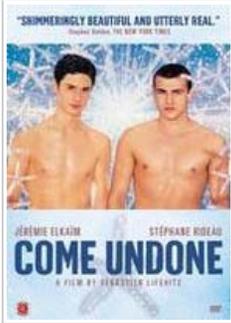
**LIBERACE THE ULTIMATE ENTERTAINER** (\$12.99 DVD; Timeless)

**THE ROYAL COLLECTION** (\$24.99 DVD; BBC)

**YOSSI** (\$27.99 DVD; Strand)

**COME UNDONE** (\$19.99 DVD; First Run Features) --

Whatever you think of the HBO movie about Liberace and the



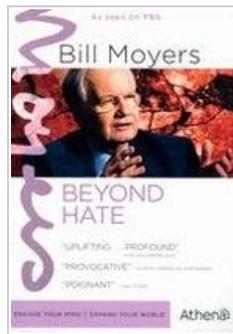
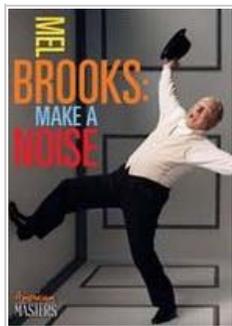
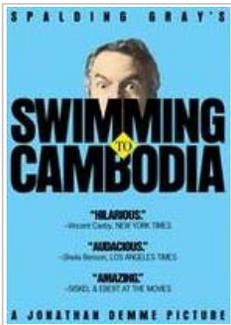
performance by Michael Douglas, it's hard not to get a shiver of pleasure out of the pure camp of the real Liberace. You get a scattering of shows from the 1960s as well as various extras like home movies, a look at his wardrobe and Liberace on the history of the piano. At every moment, he's as campy as campy can be

and you wonder what Middle America made of it all. Talk about hiding in plain sight!

I'm sure even Liberace would have been impressed by the jewels available to Queen Elizabeth II. Did they meet? I'm sure they did and got along swimmingly since both knew the importance of spectacle while maintaining a discreet distance especially in matters personal. This cardboard boxed set is just a simple way to package four titles already available: *Queen Victoria's Children*, *King George & Queen Mary*, *The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II* and *How To Be A Prince*. As a bonus you get a facsimile of the Queen's Coronation Day booklet souvenir. It's certainly a bargain price but if you own these titles the packaging and booklet are definitely not worth the extra money.

I didn't know I wanted a sequel to the lovely Israeli film *Yossi & Jagger*, but all these years later here it is. Yossi is still closeted and stuck emotionally until a young out soldier shakes him out of his doldrums and shows Yossi it's a new world. Director Eytan Fox continues to reveal the world of gay Israel in unexpected and fascinating ways.

Finally if Yossi intrigues you, you're sure to enjoy the now classic gay coming of age tale *Come Undone*. It's the sexy and sweet story of a young man on holiday at a seaside town in France who comes alive (and undone) a lot quicker than Yossi could ever have imagined. Not a truly great film overall, but for fans of the genre an essential one.



**SWIMMING TO CAMBODIA** (\$19.99 DVD; Shout)  
**AMERICAN MASTERS: MEL**

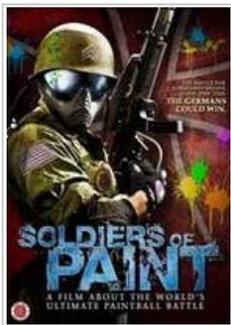
**BROOKS -- MAKE A NOISE** (\$19.99 DVD; Shout)

**BILL MOYERS BEYOND HATE** (\$34.99 DVD; Athena)

**SOLDIERS OF PAINT** (\$ DVD; First Run Features) --

Spalding Gray was a singular talent, a man who came into a room and sat down at a table and told a story. In the case of *Swimming To Cambodia*, it revolved around the making of the film *The Killing Fields* in which Gray had a small role. He created these monologues throughout his career and it's tempting to think how easy it must be to capture them on film. How can you mess it up? But in fact it's exceptionally difficult to avoid just taping a live performance, a record of what he did and actually

creating a genuine film. You could give a master class examining the lighting and sound and camera work and editing that goes into turning director Jonathan Demme's movie into a masterpiece. Or you could just have a ball watching it and laughing your ass off.



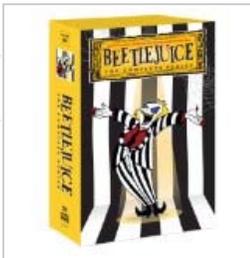
Mel Brooks knew a lot about making people laugh their asses off (fart jokes were always a good start). He's enjoying a victory lap, including this American Masters special that takes a look at his 60 year career from writer to live performer to film director and producer to musical theater impresario. He did it all, funnily enough.

Every major talent is irreplaceable. Who can do what Mel Brooks has done? I hope no one tries. But I shudder to think of television without Bill Moyers. When he retired, there was a black hole in television where thoughtful, impassioned discourse used to be. Now he's back and thank God. The special *Beyond Hate* looks at that virulent emotion in its many forms, wondering if we can rid ourselves of it, wondering what its positive purpose must be (otherwise why would it exist) and talking to people who've dealt with hate, people like Elie Siesel, Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel, Jimmy Carter and more. As usual for Moyers, it's thought-provoking, entertaining and no one else in the world would have even considered making it much less making it this well. (P.S. I'm available to substitute for Moyers on his show *Moyers & Company* whenever he needs a break. IN promise not to get as vulgar as Moyers, who recently said, "Free speech my foot!" which in the context of his show sounded like the angriest put-down I'd heard in years. :)

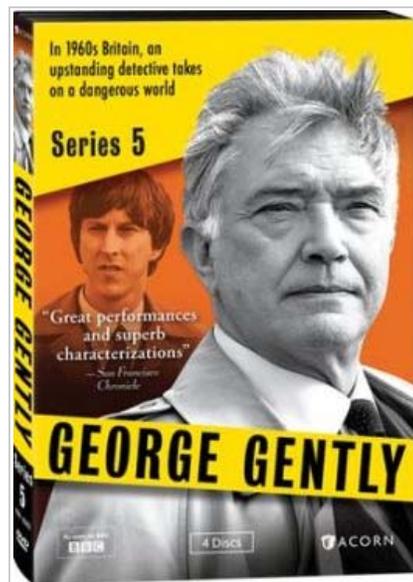
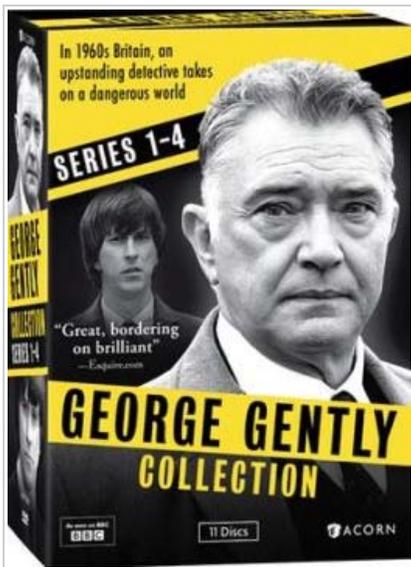
Weekend warriors and anyone who has ever developed a serious strategy for laser tag will enjoy *Soldiers of Paint*, an amusing look at an annual event in which 5000 (!) volunteers re-stage D-Day on a 700 acre plot of land in Oklahoma and each side is free to employ any strategy available to the generals at the time. In other words, there are no guarantees about who will win. A good chunk of extras for a rather modest little film.

#### **BEETLEJUICE THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$99.99 DVD;

SHOUT) -- Modestly related to the movie, this animated series was such a big hit on TV that it was briefly on ABC every Saturday and on Fox during weekday afternoons. Beetlejuice is toned down quite a bit from the film. not surprisingly. Here he is best pals with goth girl Lydia and they spend a lot of their time in the Neitherworld, where parodies of movies and books and TV shows abound (especially later in the show's run). It ran for four years and Shout has happily collected all 94

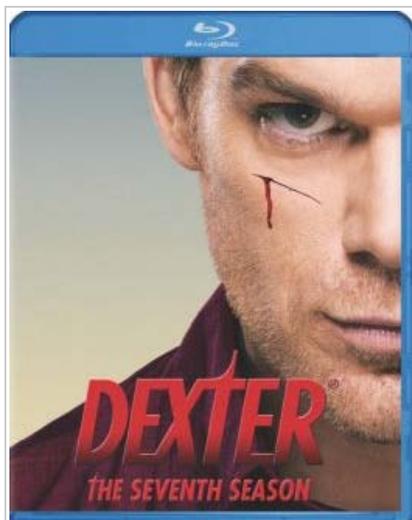
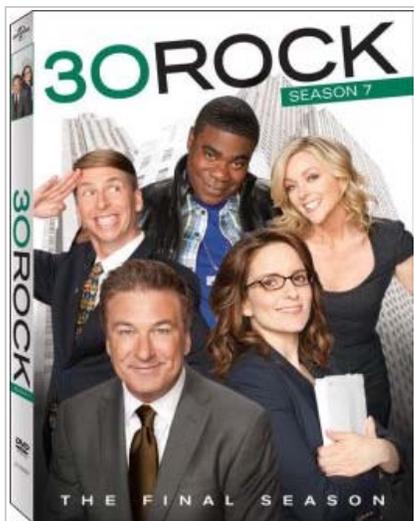


episodes in one tidy boxed set. No extras but really, fans are lucky to have the show available in one nice package when other companies would have churned out two releases from each season (and four from the final, lengthy one) for a total of 10 releases. Even at \$20 each, that would have been \$200, a lot more than the \$100 list price here. And it's available on sale for less.

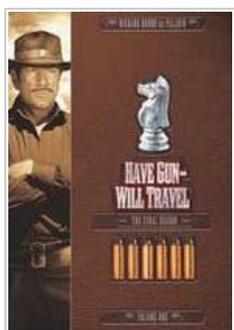
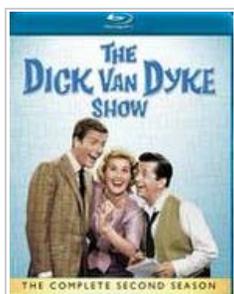


#### **GEORGE GENTLY SERIES 1-4** (\$99.99 DVD; Acorn)

**GEORGE GENTLY SERIES 5** (\$59.99 DVD; Acorn) -- This solid but second-tier British crime show is a period piece set in the North of England in the 1960s. Martin Shaw plays the Scotland Yard inspector now stuck in the hinterlands. Lee Ingleby is his sidekick, a close-minded and far less intuitive fellow who hates the way the world is changing with women and others not keeping to their place. It's a solid show but at \$60 for four TV movies in Series 5, you're clearly better off just getting the first four series or waiting until the entire series comes out in one set. \$15 an episode is a bit rich though fans of British whodunits will enjoy the setting and Shaw's performance in particular.



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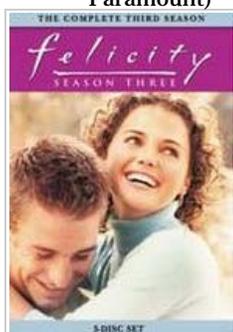
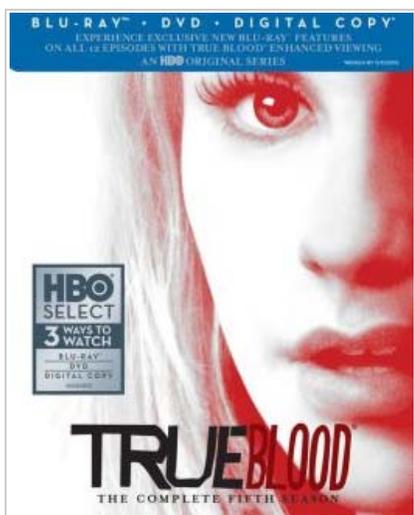


**ROCK SEASON 7** (\$44.99 DVD; Universal)

**DEXTER SEVENTH SEASON** (\$65.99 BluRay; Showtime/CBS)

**THE DICK VAN DYKE SHOW SECOND SEASON** (\$59.99 BluRay; RLJ)

**HAVE GUN WILL TRAVEL THE FINAL SEASON VOLUMES ONE AND TWO** (\$29.99 DVD each; Paramount)

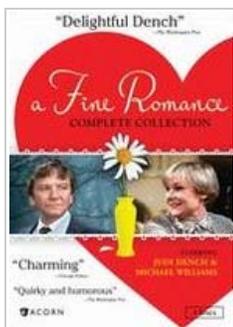


**TRUE BLOOD FIFTH SEASON** (\$79.99 BluRay; HBO)

**FELICITY SEASONS THREE AND FOUR** (\$19.99 DVD each; ABC/Lionsgate)

**A FINE ROMANCE COMPLETE COLLECTION** (\$59.99 DVD; Acorn)

-- It's never easy to say goodbye and most shows get it wrong. Here are a batch of shows making the right call, messing it up, pushing it too luck and ending it just right.



*30 Rock* has never been a favorite of mine. I find the characters too cartoonish. But kudos to Tina Fey for calling it a day after season seven, the same number of seasons as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, her clear role model. No sitcom ever got better after seven seasons and frankly none even maintained their quality except for *The Simpsons*, which would be the greatest sitcom of all time if it had ended 13 years ago. So even though NBC surely would have loved another year of the low-rated but critically acclaimed series, Fey had the class to pull the plug. Well done.

*Dexter* on the other hand reached the perfect series finale when he met his soul mate Julia Stiles in season five. Instead they chose to avoid pairing them off and seeing what happened or calling it a day at the right moment creatively. They've now said Season Eight will be the caper but it's too late. Maintaining a series about a serial killer for five seasons was simply brilliant but they've marred the legacy somewhat by producing 60% more episodes. It doesn't change the fact that Michael C Hall should have won the Emmy for Best Actor years ago. But that was years ago.

*The Dick Van Dyke Show* actually got a little tired in its fifth season when they called it a day. But that was when sitcoms would churn out 30 episodes a season. They made 158 whereas *30 Rock* would need eight years to match that total. But they ran for five years, broke into the Top 10 in season two, peaked at #3 in season three and when they slipped out of the Top 10 to #16 in season five they said goodbye. The show won 15 Emmys but only won Best Comedy in that fifth and final season. Now that's going out on top -- the second you see a tiny slip in ratings and creativity, you go home. Countless shows would mirror its dual emphasis on family and work as family.

*Have Gun Will Travel* isn't a perfect example of good timing, but hey, TV stars are only human. This amusing Western with gun for hire Paladin as its lead was an immediate smash hit. It aired for five years on Saturday night at 9:30, right before *Gunsmoke*. Richard Boone played the lead all five years and never had a better role. It hit #4 its first season, #3 for the next two seasons and then dropped to #29 or so, even though in its final season its lead-in *The Defenders* was the strongest support the show ever had, ranking at #18. Sure *Gunsmoke* had faded from the #1 slot, but it was still potent. Still, they didn't moan their fate or dragged it out. Three smash years and two solid ones and Paladin rode off into the sunset.

*Felicity* was never a big hit -- it ranked #123 in its peak year of season three (though season one reached the most viewers). But it was a show about college and to actually have it last four years -- freshman, sophomore, junior and senior -- was pretty amazing (and certainly not realistic, if my epic college journey is any indication). Yes, it was a pop culture phenomenon and had clearly reached its sell-by date. But it's rare for the team to realize that. Instead of following *Felicity* into the real world, it resolved the romantic triangle at the heart of the series, took its degree and cleaned out of the dorm once and for all. These DVD sets are especially inexpensive, which is exactly what every older TV show should strive for. If it means keeping prices down, we can do without extras, thank you. Now let's see how long Keri Russell sticks with her high concept series *The Americans*, another show that most definitely should not drag itself out more than about four years.

We could all learn a lesson from the Brits. Ever since *Fawlty Towers* (if not sooner), the Brits have been eager to prize quality over quantity. They often do just a few episodes at a time, rest, and then after a year or two tackle some more. *The Office* is a prime recent example. Twelve episodes, two specials and it's one of the greatest sitcoms of all time that the American version with its 9 seasons and 201 (!) episodes couldn't hold a candle to. (They'd be the first to agree.) So here we have the charming romantic comedy *A Fine Romance*. It stars the great Judi Dench and her real-life partner Michael Williams as two middle-aged people embarking on a new relationship. True, they made four seasons right in a row, but they only made 6 or 7 episodes each year. That adds up to 26 episodes, just enough to tell the story they wanted to tell and be done with it. Jolly good, in every sense.

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*Most titles listed here will be available in multiple formats and in multiple combinations,*

including DVD, Blu-ray, digital download, video on demand, streaming and the like. The format listed is the format provided for review, not all the formats available. It is often the most expensive version with the most extras. Do check individual titles for availability in all their various guises and price points.

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