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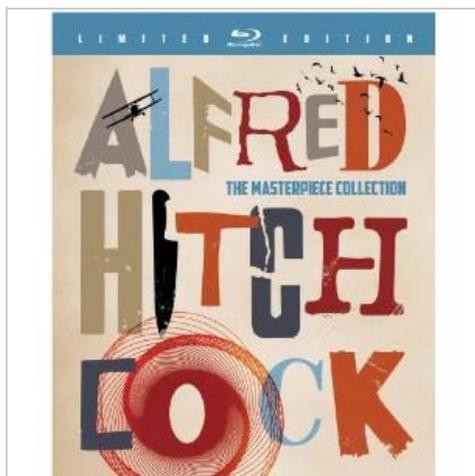
ENTERTAINMENT

DVDs: And the Winner Is... Alfred Hitchcock by a Landslide!

Posted: 11/06/2012 3:45 am



Here's one poll you can trust: whenever film buffs vote on the best directors of all time, Alfred Hitchcock will score highly. If you're looking for a distraction on Election Day until the results are in, check out my reviews of a new boxed set of Hitch and other releases.

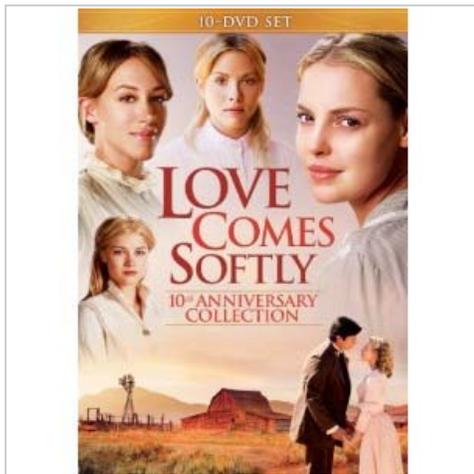


ALFRED HITCHCOCK: THE MASTERPIECE COLLECTION

(\$299.98 BluRay; Universal) -- As you know, Alfred Hitchcock is one of the greatest directors of all time and surely one of the most purely cinematic. His stories were conceived entirely as movies, whatever their source, and have his particular stamp. Even the most casual of movie fans can understand what an auteur is if they think of Hitch. Any boxed set of his work is cause for celebration and this 15 film set from Universal is no exception. It's not definitive -- huge chunks of his career are not covered here -- but as with any era of his work, it

contains a strong number of genuine classics: *Rear Window*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, *North By Northwest* and *Shadow Of A Doubt* to be specific. I could name five other movies of his just as great but even these would be enough to enshrine his name forever. All these movies look terrific in this new BluRay boxed set, by and large. And the packaging is elegant and ideal. The set is compact, taking up the space of just two regular DVD boxes on your shelf. But it contains those five movies and ten more for a total of 15 in all, including other strong films like *Saboteur*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* remake and *The Birds*. I couldn't find a credit but whomever designed the graphic look of this box deserves a raise. The artwork on the front is subtle and smart, the stills montage on the book is sensational and that same montage forms the profile of Hitch on the inside cover of the booklet/album that slides out nicely. Each thick page incorporates one of the great

posters created for each film and while I generally dislike sleeves to contain discs, these are so glossy and smooth inside and out that potential damage to the discs is minimal. The booklet is also well designed. In short, this set has been beautifully produced from top to bottom...except for one tiny detail. Unfortunately, it's the most important detail of all: the remastering of the movies presented on BluRay. The most popular and acclaimed titles have usually been taken care of, hence the ease with which *North By Northwest* and *Rear Window* are seen here. It's the later, lesser films that get the short end of the stick. This isn't just a case of poor source material but unnecessary indifference on the part of the people involved: how else to explain the shabby treatment of *Frenzy* and *Family Plot* and *Marnie* in particular. I'm no techie obsessed with subtle details and sound mix issues, so believe me when it's apparent that the utmost care was not taken with a significant minority of the films here. The most egregious errors meant the set had to be delayed in order to correct errors in a newly designed title sequence on one film, but no effort was made to change the sloppy job done on a number of films here. Let me be clear: this set contains strong editions of some of the best titles here and they look smashing on BluRay. The lesser films are mildly acceptable in a boxed set where the movies you will enjoy most look good and the movies you will watch least are indifferent or poor. They're not terribly worse than the DVD versions in earlier sets or individual releases. But it's a crying shame any caveats have to be offered on a set for one of Hollywood's greatest and most popular directors. If all his films (even the minor ones) can't be treated with care, whose will be? I'd take the ill with the good if you don't own any of these films or just want them on BluRay, so this isn't a dismissal of the set. The movies are too good for that and the best here do look very good. But this is not up to the standard of Universal's recent excellent *Monster* boxed set or the individual releases like *Jaws* that they've put out this anniversary year. P.S. What are his greatest hits, the best of the best? *The 39 Steps*, *The Lady Vanishes*, *Rebecca*, *Shadow Of A Doubt*, *Notorious*, *Rear Window*, *Vertigo*, *North By Northwest* and *Psycho*.



LOVE COMES SOFTLY 10TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

(\$69.98 DVD; Fox)

THE KATHY GRIFFIN

COLLECTION: RED WHITE + RAW

(\$24.97 DVD; Shout)

COPPER SEASON ONE (\$59.98

BluRay; BBC)

THE STREETS OF SAN FRANCISCO

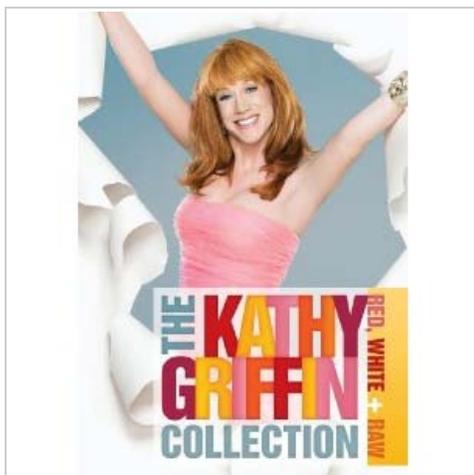
SEASON FIVE (\$89.98 DVD;

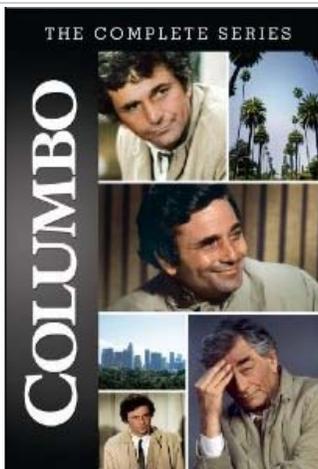
Paramount)

COLUMBO: THE COMPLETE

SERIES (\$149.98 DVD; Universal) --

The novels by Janette Oke launched the family drama TV movie franchise *Love Comes Softly* ten years ago. Few entries in the annual TV movies have matched the quality of the original starring Katherine Heigl but they're all dependable, wholesome fare for those looking for a *slightly* more adult, romantic spin on frontier dramas a la *Little House* and *Dr. Quinn*. This nicely compact set contains ten movies in the franchise, though for some inexplicable reason I don't fathom not the eleventh one (a Christmas special) that is available separately. If you find a person who is passionate about *Love Comes Softly* and *Kathy Griffin*, I'd marry her. You can't put a price on never knowing what to expect



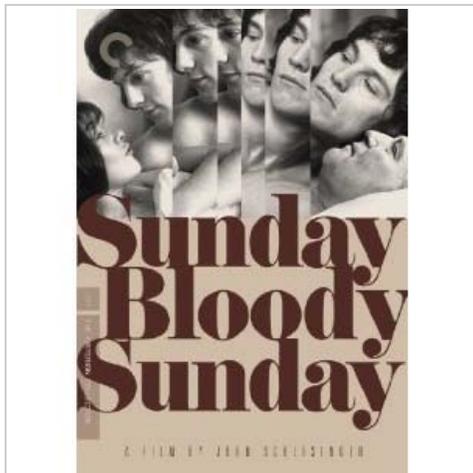
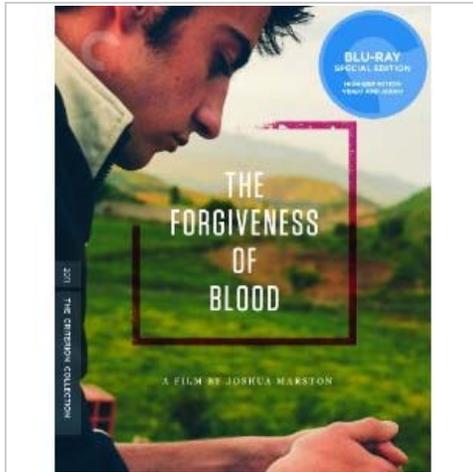
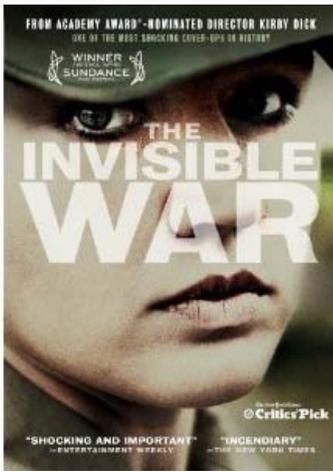


from a partner. It's more likely the cross-over in these two titles will be modest, thanks to Griffin's naughty Bravo specials poking fun at everyone and everything in scandalous, secular style. For those looking for TV sets with mystery, the first season of *Copper* holds promise. The first original drama for BBC America somehow makes sense in that environment, even though the only thing "BBC" about it is the aim for quality in this relatively violent and gritty look at police work in New York City in 1864. Things were politer but no less easier on the West Coast in the 1970s. The final season of *The Streets Of San Francisco* prove that. It doesn't help that Michael Douglas took off for Hollywood after two episodes and handed the baton to Richard Hatch, but Karl Malden remains a no-nonsense anchor. Just one more thing...the best TV set of all this week is a complete collection of *Columbo* that contains both the entire series and the TV movies in a nice compact set. Peter Falk's shambling, curious, slyly intelligent detective remains a sheer delight, even if the mysteries and guest stars date the show a bit.

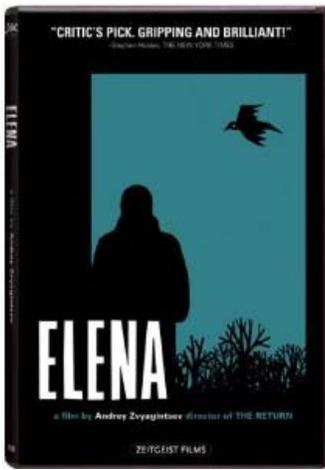
THE INVISIBLE WAR (\$29.95 DVD; Docurama) -- Surely the most enraging film of the year is this documentary about the epidemic of rape in the military. *The Invisible War* convincingly asserts that twenty percent of all active duty female servicemembers are sexually assaulted. It follows the story of soldiers who selflessly offer to serve their country and then are raped and abandoned by the institution they sacrificed so much to join. This is not a problem because women are part of the military. It's a problem reflective of society where rape is treated too cavalierly and public image is placed above justice and honor. Anyone puzzled by how a football program or a religious institution or a national broadcasting network can look the other way at child molestation should watch this film. They'll see another example of how far away we are from actively and regularly confronting acts of sexual violence against women, men and children.

THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD
(\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

SUNDAY BLOODY SUNDAY (\$29.95 DVD; Criterion)

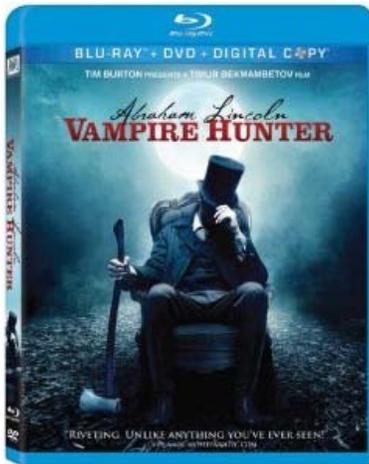


ELENA (\$29.99 DVD; Zeitgeist) -- It's always exciting when Criterion throws its support behind a new director. I think I'd be more excited by that stamp of approval than almost any award short of an Oscar. So I'm sure director Joshua Marston was thrilled by the reception to his strong first feature *Maria Full Of Grace*. His somehow unexpected followup is just as adventurous: a tale of a blood feud in contemporary Albania centering around a teen who is literally trapped in his home. If he leaves, enemies will kill him in revenge. Nothing personal; it's just the way things are. It didn't get quite the traction that *Maria* enjoyed, but not to worry Marston: Criterion has spotted your career potential and thrown its lot in with you thanks to this typically fine release with strong extras. I may be especially attuned to this film since a friend of mine is in Albania even as we speak shooting a documentary about that country's 100th anniversary. But any film lover will spot the intelligence at work in this solid second film. I'm not a big fan of John Schlesinger so that probably explains why it took me so long to see his love triangle *Sunday Bloody Sunday*. It was obviously bold for its day with the matter-of-fact depiction of a gay man played by Peter Finch (albeit with classical music in the background and so on). But the strong performances slowly won me over until the theatrical flourish at the end quite blindsided me. The pity is that I can't find Murray Head a worthy object of affection for Finch or the marvelous Glenda Jackson. Still, it holds up better than most "controversial" movies of the early 1970s, thank goodness. I bet someday Criterion puts a film by director Andrey Zvyagintsev in their hall of fame. His movie *The Return* was masterful. This follow-up is also controlled and intriguing if not quite as



emotionally gripping. It shows a husband and wife living in tense domesticity. He's dying and she's the blue collar nurse who

was once his care taker but graduated to his wife. They live in luxury though her lazy, needy family is always nearby seemingly with a hand out for a hand-out, which brings out his disdain. Elena is always there quietly, observantly; tending to his needs, mediating between him and her family, spending time with her children and their families when she can. When Elena brings about a truce between her husband and his daughter from an earlier marriage, it works out a little too well and he makes clear her kids will never see a penny now that his child has reunited with him. What to do? Elena apparently will find an answer. A marvelous score by Philip Glass proves the composer knows talent when he sees it too.



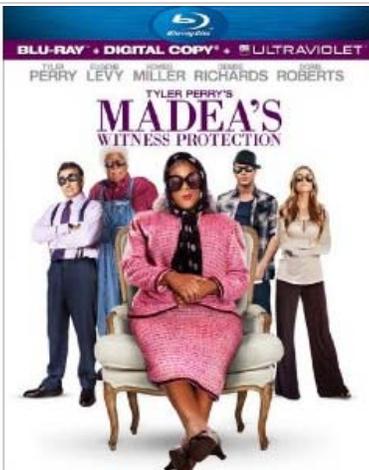
ABRAHAM LINCOLN, VAMPIRE HUNTER (\$39.99 BluRay; Fox)

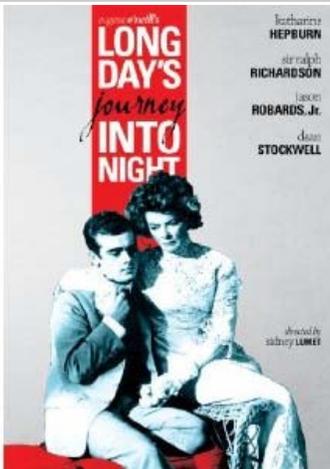
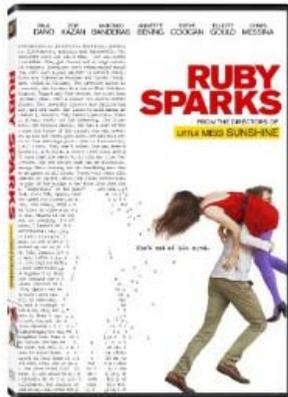
TYLER PERRY'S MADEA'S WITNESS PROTECTION (\$39.98 BluRay; Lionsgate)

THE CAMPAIGN (\$29.98 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

RUBY SPARKS (\$29.98 BluRay; Fox) --

Mostly, these are the sort of movies people rent and stream because they're looking for something to watch and, hey, these were advertised and they remember the ads. So instead of watching a classic they're a lot more likely to love, people just watch whatever came out in theaters four or five months ago. Ah well. Don't say I didn't warn you: the best thing about *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* is in fact it's title. *The Campaign* isn't nearly as funny as the trailer might lead you to believe and after the Presidential election is over, it may well be the last thing in the world you'd want to watch right now. Tyler Perry continues to improve as a director and with a strong supporting cast -- Marla Gibbs, Eugene Levy, John Amos and Doris Roberts -- this is one of the stronger *Madea* films. Still you know what you're getting. You don't know what you're getting with *Ruby Sparks*, an offbeat romantic comedy about a struggling writer (Paul Dano) who imagines a dream girl only to see her





come to life. It doesn't fulfill the premise of this quirky idea but at least it's trying.

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT (\$24.95 BluRay;

Olive/Paramount)

THE BRAIN (\$24.95 BluRay;

Olive/Paramount) --

Two films with absolutely nothing in common except both are out on BluRay thanks to Olive.

Long Day's Journey is one of Sidney Lumet's peak works, featuring Katharine Hepburn, Ralph Richardson, Jason Robards Jr. and Dean Stockwell in Eugene O'Neill's lengthy tragedy. It's quietly hellish. *The Brain* is a polar opposite, a feature film frothy bit of nonsense starring David Niven, as the criminal mastermind of the title. I vividly remember this crime caper's finale, an early lesson in the fact that stories don't have to be tied up neatly (or even "ended") in order to be satisfying. But my pleasure over rediscovering a childhood flick I enjoyed on TV late at night was trumped by my astonishment that the film is in French. This international co-production was filmed in both English and French and naturally I only saw the much shorter English version on American TV. But here is Niven rattling away in French (he doesn't even seem to be dubbed!) and an extra 15 minutes in the twists and turns for me to puzzle over. Really, you could knock me over with a feather.

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