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Best DVDs of 2007

Posted January 7, 2008 | 05:49 PM (EST)

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I've been covering DVDs for Huffington Post for six months now. How time flies when you're trying to choose between Blu-Ray and HD-DVD! (My decision: neither; wait till one crashes and burns.) So here's a rundown of my favorite DVDs of 2007. My guiding principle is to highlight DVDs that either introduced me to a movie or TV show I might have otherwise missed (like In Between Days) or a DVD whose extras deepened my appreciation of the film.

What I don't want to do is just list the DVD releases of the best films of the year. So Ratatouille is one of my favorites of 2007 but since I didn't really explore the DVD extras and it certainly didn't introduce me to the film, it's not listed here. Look for it on my favorite movies of the year list, coming soon (as soon as I can go see There Will Be Blood and work my way through about 20 more films, that is). Enjoy!

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MR. ARKADIN (\$49.95; Criterion) -- This Orson Welles oddity can stand in for just about any and every terrific release from Criterion both this and every year. Criterion outdoes itself with two theatrical versions, a new definitive version, radio plays featuring the character and even the complete novel

that Welles may or may not have written. I might just as well have included Criterion's impeccable DVD sets for Ace in The Hole (\$39.95) or Berlin Alexanderplatz (\$124.95) or any of their other releases.

IN BETWEEN DAYS (\$29.95; Kino) -- This well-observed Sundance feature about a South Korean teenager coming of age in a cold, Northeastern town is just the sort of small movie that can slip through the cracks in theaters but get discovered and appreciated on DVD. A very promising feature by director So Yong Kim.

FOYLE'S WAR IV (\$59.99; Acorn) - Not the strongest batch of mysteries for this WW II-set British series. But Michael Kitchens remains brilliantly incisive as Foyle -- a man of few words who makes every one count to magnetic effect - and he's surrounded by a top-notch supporting cast led by the delightfully named Honeysuckle Weeks. Best of all, the DVDs contain the entire, uncut

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episodes while PBS bizarrely edits the shows down to fit into a 90 minute slot. So anyone who really wants to appreciate the series simply has to wait for the DVDs. PBS should be ashamed of itself.

THE GRADUATE 40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (\$24.98; MGM) - An iconic film, this edition benefits from director Steven Soderbergh, who's got a second career interviewing directors for DVD commentary tracks. Pairing him with the witty and quick-thinking director Mike Nichols pays off just as you'd hope.

THE MUPPET SHOW: THE COMPLETE SECOND SEASON (\$39.99; Buena Vista) - What a relief to discover that a variety show you loved as a kid is just as charming when you're all grown up. Top-notch guests like Julie Andrews and Steve Martin certainly help but it wouldn't work without the delights of Kermit, Miss Piggy, Fozzie Bear and the rest. Even saying their names can make you smile and this classic show doesn't disappoint.

STANLEY KUBRICK - DIRECTORS SERIES (\$79.98; Warner Bros.) - Finally a gross miscarriage of justice is reversed. Warner Bros. previously released boxed sets of Kubrick's films that they insisted matched his meticulous desires when it came to presentation by showing cropped versions geared towards TV and home viewing. But sometimes directors are idiots. Here they've finally given in and presented the original theatrical versions in beautiful prints with useful extras. You get *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *The Shining*, and *Eyes Wide Shut*. What amazes the most is how each and every one of them continues to improve on repeated viewing and with the passing of time.

CINEMA 16: EUROPEAN SHORT FILMS (\$29.98; Warp Films) - A collection of shorts by rising and top-named directors like Ridley Scott, Christopher Nolan (is he European?), Lars Von Trier and my personal favorite Roy Andersson. Quite simply, before DVDs these shorts would be simply unavailable even to hardcore cineastes. For all intents and purposes, they wouldn't exist because if a work of art can't be seen and appreciated, how can it be said to survive?

BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN (\$29.95; Kino) - A beautifully restored new edition of Eisenstein's masterpiece, a film so vital and electric it might have been made tomorrow instead of in the silent era. I was torn between choosing this and *I Am Cuba: The Ultimate Edition* (\$44.95), Milestone's beautifully packaged set of that fever dream of a cinematic postcard. Both are essential for movie buffs.

TWIN PEAKS DEFINITIVE GOLD BOX EDITION (\$99.99; Paramount) - Finally, the entire series available in one boxed set (including the mysteriously disappearing two hour pilot which wasn't included in the previous Season One set). Loaded with enough extras to sate even the most fervent fan of the show. Now you can just stop watching once the killer of Laura Palmer is revealed and pretend it's one of the greatest miniseries in TV history instead of a brilliant series that lost its way.

BOB DYLAN - Two great musical DVDs about Bob: *Don't Look Back 1965 Tour Deluxe Edition* (\$49.95; Docurama) included even more footage from that electric moment in his career. And *Bob Dylan: The Other Side Of The Mirror* (\$19.98; Sony) simply and perfectly shows Dylan's explosive growth as an artist and a star via three years of performances at the Newport Folk Festival. I also enjoyed *Amazing Journey: The Story of the Who* (\$29.98; Universal) and the absurdly long overdue release of *Nirvana Unplugged: Live in New York* (\$19.98; Geffen). But even they come second to Mr. Zimmerman.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND - (\$39.95; Sony) - A tremendously entertaining, adult film by Steven Spielberg, who was bedeviled by the lure of TV and theatrical re-releases into endlessly fiddling with this classic. Here, he finally does it justice by offering the original theatrical release along with every other version and a new final, final edition.

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. - THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$249.99; Warner Bros.) - An iconic TV series that had passed me by got the deluxe treatment on DVD, which meant I got to see this show for the first time. A silly spy series that got sillier with the passage of time, it's a touchstone for people that grew up with it and fun for those who didn't. Best of all, lavish extras were clear-eyed enough to discuss the show's artistic stumbles with a fan's loving exactitude. And sometimes, just getting the show on DVD at all is reward enough. That's certainly the case with *Saturday Night Live Complete Second Season* (\$69.98; Universal). But *Young Indiana Jones Volume Two: The War Years* (\$129.99; Paramount) offers both the delight of Sean Patrick Flanery

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ATLANTA — Traces of a

as young Indy and solid documentary extras that fulfill George Lucas' desire to create a series both fun and genuinely informative.

The worst DVDs of the year: I was most disappointed in the individual, director's cut editions of Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* (\$29.95; Dimension) and Robert Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* (\$29.95; Dimension), two very fun movies. However artistically successful -- or not -- they may be, there was no excuse for not releasing *Grindhouse* in a single set as originally seen in theaters: as a double bill with trailers stuck in the middle. It's especially annoying because you know they'll put it out at some point and fans who might have preferred that version in the first place simply have to buy it all over again.

So what were your favorite DVDs of the year -- whether they were released in 2007 or not?

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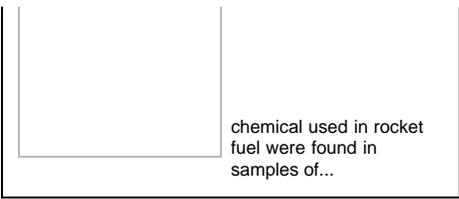
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Guitarsandmore See Profile I'm a Fan of Guitarsandmore permalink

Best Musical is "Once" with Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova. This DVD has the best music on it and

the sound track is just awesome.

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 **Hollywoodaholic** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Hollywoodaholic](#) [permalink](#)

The iconic 60s television series "Route 66" finally came out on DVD. Part Jack Kerouac beat poet philosophy, part travel-ogue of America (a television series actually shot on the road), part buddy picture, but mostly just great characters and writing from Stirling Silliphant. And those qualities never age.

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 **celiedh** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of celiedh](#) [permalink](#)

Hi, Michael. Kino and Criterion are great, but "I am Cuba" is a Milestone Release. Thought I'd better tell you before Dennis Doros does!

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Blade Runner: Super Duper Version

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Libsrule, thanks for reading. Movie night is usually after midnight so if you're a late night person you'll be good. I was late to Firefly despite loving Buffy but really enjoyed the movie and now regret giving away the TV series to my friend John. Forbidden Planet is a classic, somehow both well known and still a bit of an obscurity.

Apples, to be honest I've NEVER been huge on the extras. Maybe because it can mean a two hour movie can take ten hours to watch and I'd rather watch three other films in that time.

I think RevATHist is right that Blu-Ray may finally have pulled ahead of HD-DVD. But until one officially collapses, I'm not going to spend my money on either.

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Gosh, do you have movie nights at your house with guests and all?

Cuz I want to invite myself. Yes I know, that's rude but dang you seem to have such good taste in flicks, and although I don't agree with all of them, I do like reading your take on them and when possible and I get the chance I look at them again with a different perspective.

Uh...okay so when's the next movie night and will it entail a plane ticket?

As for my favorite DVD's of the year?

Well I'm a bit embarrassed to tell you as they will probalby seem all so plebian to you, but I bought the FUTURAMA DVD set and Love it.

Then I got Bender's Big Score. Loved it too but I was still hoping for a new series instead.

Dinner Rush. I just think this is one of those great little movies with an ending that took me by surprise. So I bought the DVD.

Picked up FORBIDDEN PLANET The Special Edition.. LOVE THAT MOVIE!!

MADAGASCAR. I just love this flick. Great animation, humor is all over the place. At least three dozen movie references, some obscure and some in your face.

I also ordered the movie I discussed last time HARA KIRU (which I hope you got, it's from criterion) and have watched it twice. GODDAMN BUT THAT IS A GREAT MOVIE!

I also got the special edition of SERENITY.

Don't know if you ever got into the FIREFLY series but I really liked it. It was different and had NO SOUND IN SPACE. It seemed more real than any science fiction I've encountered.

I sent copies of FIREFLY to two friends and they liked it as well...or at least they said they did.

Anyway, space constraints and all.

Oh and I've started looking more into the Criterion library. They got some cool stuff, so NEXT January, let's see what my picks will be then.

Love your stuff Michael!

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Apples [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Apples](#) [permalink](#)

I think the latest release of 2001: A Space Odyssey may well be my favorite of this past year, particularly in light of the commentary of Kier Dullea and Gary Lockwood. It's not the best commentary around, but there was enough new material mentioned there that kept me glued.

Strangely enough, I've become less interested in the extras than I used to be. There have been too many 'Making of...' documentaries issued that were really promotional films used for cable. When I think of the 'Making of...' documentary filmed for, say, Taxi Driver that lasted almost as long as the feature, a PR piece of fluff used to pad out other DVDs doesn't add up to much.

Now, about Blue-Ray... Any ideas when the hi-def situation will level out and it'll be safe to buy one or the other?

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Jude2004 [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Jude2004](#) [permalink](#)

The Bourne trilogy with cool packaging including a passport containing even more extra features.

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AsaNisMasa [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of AsaNisMasa](#) [permalink](#)

Criterion's release of "Breathless" hands down.

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