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DVDs: Bigger Is Better

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DVDs have been a game changer in so many ways: their great picture and sound has middle class families flocking to flat screen TVs and surround sound systems. They've got people building libraries of movies the same way they collect music albums and books. And just like those book and CD libraries, DVD libraries are bursting with massive boxed sets, the sort of thing people rarely pull out and watch (or read or listen to) but which they proudly display.

Now, next to the complete works of Mark Twain or Mozart or that Miles Davis boxed set (when all you really listen to is *Kind of Blue*), you can find *Everybody Loves Raymond: The Complete Series* (\$279.98; HBO) in a box shaped like a suburban home and collecting all nine seasons of the durable sitcom. Unlike a serialized drama or miniseries, most sitcoms don't need to be seen in strict order. In fact, sitcoms usually shouldn't be watched in big batches. It tends to dull the fun. So why would anyone buy this massive boxed set? Because it's a very good, sometimes great show; because watching them in order can be subtly more satisfying; and because putting it on your shelf says, "I really liked this show!" Someone with the complete original *Star Trek* or the complete *Benny Hill*? Entirely different message.

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Also just out is Season One of *Flight of the Conchords* (\$29.98; HBO), which is perfect for people who don't own HBO or just want to skip to the musical numbers; and *Melrose Place: Third Season* (\$54.99; Paramount), because if you don't watch every episode of a soap in order, how will you remember who is

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sleeping with whom? And thanks to DVDs, countless hours of TV memories that might have been lost forever are rescued. Bob Hope's decades of TV specials are celebrated in *Bob Hope: The Ultimate Collection* (\$29.99; R2), a two disc set with nearly eight hours of highlights. Even better is *Here's Johnny: The Definitive DVD Collection* (\$99.99; R2), a 12 disc set that packs together four previous collections in one massive box. It contains about 20 hours of well-chosen clips, which sounds like a lot until you realize he delivered 4,500 hours of TV over the years.

But maybe the defining TV on DVD experience is to watch a classic serialized drama or miniseries. And it doesn't get more classic than Fassbinder's epic 13 part German miniseries *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (\$124.95; Criterion), a work hailed as a masterpiece when it was shown in US

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cinemas in two (very long) parts and then disappeared. This is the idea way to experience Fassbinder's masterpiece, presented with typical flair by Criterion with new documentaries, new subtitles and even an earlier 1931 version of the same source novel.

Just as DVD has woken up the studios to the riches in their TV vaults, it's slowly dawning on the people broadcasting sports that fans will fork over big bucks for DVDs celebrating their players' exploits. *Stanley Cup Game 7 Collection* (\$79.98; Warner Bros.) contains six complete Game 7s (including the New York Rangers ending their 54 year drought in 1994) along with highlights from every other Game 7 ever played. *Yankeeography Mega-Set* (\$99.95; A&E) collects 34 complete episodes of the Yankee biography series covering greats like Babe Ruth and Phil Rizutto to Joe Torre and Derek Jeter. (And no, Alex Rodriguez isn't included.) Wrestling fans have been showered with titles, including *John Cena: My Life* (\$34.95; WWE), a three disc set covering his entire career, seven complete matches and a tour of his car collection. Even the dowdy world of tennis is slowly getting into the act: *Wimbledon: The 2007 Official Film* (\$24.99; Kultur White Star) misses the mark with a rookie mistake: a 60 minute film for an event that covers two weeks and includes hundreds of hours of tennis? *Wimbledon: The 2007 Men's Final* (\$24.99; Kultur White Star) is much better: it contains the entire three hour and 45 minute match, the warm-ups, the pre-game interviews, the trophy ceremony and so on. That *2007 Official Film* would have made a nice extra, folks, not an entire film on its own. Finally, the DVD voom for sports has produced the lavish *America's Game: Super Bowl I-XL* (\$199.98; Warner Bros.), which collects 40 new one hour documentaries on the first 40 Super Bowls. The effort put into this boxed set, which makes use of the terrific archives from the NFL is superlative - and will be even more spectacular if and when it comes out in HD. It's just one more example that with DVDs, sports fans have entered the Promised Land.

Also out this week: Steven Spielberg's still-breathtaking classic *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind Ultimate Edition* (\$39.95; Sony), which settles all arguments by properly providing every version of the film out there, from the theatrical version to the final, final one Spielberg just signed off on; *The Charles Burnett Collection* (\$39.95; Milestone), a faultless 2 disc set containing his legendary debut *Killer Of Sheep*, two versions of *My Brother's Wedding*, four shorts by Burnett and more in an exemplary package; *La Vie En Rose* (\$27.95; HBO), the story of Edith Piaf featuring a performance by Marion Cotillard as the Little Sparrow that is sure to be catnip to the Oscars; the animated blockbuster *Shrek The Third* (\$29.99; DreamWorks), which will struggle to get an Oscar nomination thanks to a terrific year for animated films; a real-life Gumball Rally in *3000 Miles* (\$19.99; Revolver) including Tony Hawk, who should know better, and Bam Margera, who doesn't; *Ocean's Thirteen* (\$28.98; Warner Bros.), which is indeed better than *Ocean's Twelve* if not quite as finger-snapping cool as *Ocean's Eleven* but since that was far better than the original *Ocean's Eleven*, they're still ahead of the game; director Oliver Smolders could give David Lynch lessons in being odd, as proven with his feature debut *Black Night* (\$29.95; Cult Epics) and his collection of shorts *Spiritual Exercises* (\$29.95; Cult Films); the delightful fantasy *The Princess Bride: 20th Anniversary* (\$19.98; MGM), which should be shared with your children *after* you've all read the classic novel together; the airless, brutal drama *Flanders* (\$26.98; Koch) and a peek back at life in Duckburg, USA via *DuckTales, Volume 3* (\$34.99; Disney).

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