

# DVDs: Boxed Set Bonanza!

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OK, Black Friday is gone. Cyber Monday is over. And you still have a lot of shopping to do, don't you? Or maybe it's time you bought yourself a treat, the sort of indulgence you know you want but don't have enough confidence in your family and friends to believe they'll understand how important it is for you? Whatever the case, elaborate boxed sets and great titles are flooding into stores. Loads of TV shows of course.

As the era of people buying and owning discs comes to an end, the studios are finally making some classic shows available for purchase while they still can. Here's a look at some of the best. Keep in mind, every boxed set tends to have a torturous history. Fans of the show may have purchased single seasons or earlier versions of a boxed set and now feel the new boxed set is unfair or incomplete or should have arrived earlier, etc. etc. And there's no winning: decide to purchase single seasons and they stop before they're done and then put out a boxed set. Buy a boxed set and then future single seasons get remastered with new bonus info and on and on. Rather than debate each set's history, I'll treat each set as if you're a new fan coming to the series fresh and wondering whether these sets are the way to go. Money is no object, clearly, though the list prices here are often much higher than discounted options you can find. So here we go!

**MISS MARPLE VOLUME ONE** (\$44.99 BluRay; BBC)

**AGATHA CHRISTIE'S POIROT: COMPLETE CASES COLLECTION** (\$399.99 BluRay; Acorn)

**PSYCH COMPLETE SERIES** (\$199.98 DVD; Universal)

This new Miss Marple release is SO UNFAIR! (Did you read the introduction? :) Jane Hickson is the definitive Miss Marple for most, I'd say, though someday I think she will be supplanted by an actress who gets to make all of the 12 novels and around 20 short stories featuring this sly senior citizen. This new season one set is on BluRay and remastered and it looks terrific. If you're new to the series, you're in for a treat. But there are only twelve mysteries in the three seasons of Miss Marple starring Hickson. And there isn't a soul on the planet who is interested in just season one. They really should have remastered all 12 and put them out in one neat, complete boxed set. For goodness sake, the series ended almost 25 years ago. The interest is surely there or they wouldn't put out this first season. So in and of itself, quality TV for those who love their murder with a British accent. But a missed opportunity.

Poirot of course has been packaged and repackaged countless times, thanks to a series that began in 1989 (while Jane Hickson was still making Miss Marple) and ended just last year! It's curious to me that we've got an essentially complete Poirot (which includes 36 episodes and 34 movie-length mysteries) even though he's had twice as many adventures as Marple. One look at David Suchet in his career-defining role and you know why. (Defining but not limiting; he's an excellent stage actor and has done great work outside the show.) He simply is Poirot and while almost every legendary embodiment of a character gets overshadowed someday (I thought Basil Rathbone would always be Holmes but now it's Jeremy Brett who pops to mind), well I don't see that happening to Suchet for a long, long, long time. If ever. Given the decades it took to create these shows, one can't complain about all the prior versions of seasons and sets. Here it all is at last, offered up in an elegant, handsome, relatively compact set. Every episode. Every movie. Copious extras. And -- remarkably -- worth the wait.

Psych isn't remotely in the same league as those two. But I'll bet there's a fair amount of cross-over for fans who enjoy losing themselves in relatively gentle crime stories. I never thought Dule Hill would have comic chops.

(Frankly, I never thought anyone from the oh so earnest West Wing would have comic chops.) But he's wonderful here paired with James Roday as a fake psychic. Their chemistry is off the charts and that can carry you through a lot of not-so-puzzling tales. Psych ran for eight seasons. It may not be the sort of show you really have to watch in order -- any episode will do for a rainy day. And it may be more than you need, but isn't that the point of a gift -- to get someone something they might never get themselves but actually kind of really want? Plus, the pineapple on the cover looks cool.

**ESPN 30 FOR 30 ULTIMATE COLLECTION** (\$249.95 DVD in locker or \$199.95 BluRay; ESPN/Team Marketing)

For many years, HBO has been the standard bearer for sports documentaries. That clearly stuck in the craw of ESPN and they finally did something about it. The result is 30 For 30, an umbrella name for a series of documentaries that has proven wide-ranging, entertaining and generally excellent. They've covered big stars, small events, the impact of Title IX, biographies, dynasties, soccer, zeroed in on individual trades (the first film was about Wayne Gretzky being traded to the Oilers and was directed by Peter Berg) and much more. Hardcore fans of sports will soak up this massive set that collects everything so far. Personally, I always prefer compact sets that fit alongside my other DVDs and BluRays. But if you want to wow someone, they've had [special DVD sets on Groupon](#) that come in a metallic sports locker and overflowing with extras like t-shirts, hats and posters. You can also buy it at most outlets in a less expensive BluRay edition. Both contain about 100 feature length film and documentary shorts. 30 For 30 is second only to SportsCenter when it comes to a defining feature of this cable channel and this truly elaborate set is a worthy tribute. Many more will come because 30 For 30 should continue to run as long as ESPN airs and they are committed to maintaining its high standards.

**UPSTAIRS DOWNSTAIRS THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION** (\$199.99 DVD; Acorn)

**THE SOPRANOS COMPLETE SERIES ON BLURAY** (\$279.98 BluRay; HBO)

**SGT. BILKO/THE PHIL SILVER SHOW COMPLETE SERIES** (\$129.99 DVD; Shout)

**THE OFFICE THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$199.98 DVD; Universal)

**MERLIN THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$197.50 BluRay; BBC)

What's the greatest TV show of all time? ([Here's my latest stab at that perennial question.](#)) That's a constantly moving target, of course, with new shows debuting in a blaze of glory but unable to maintain quality. Old shows that were beloved become dated. Others that seemed strong look better and better with each passing year. And so on. But almost any serious TV fan and certainly most critics would list Upstairs Downstairs as one of the greats. It was the first great TV drama that would stand the test of time. It also blazed a trail of innovation and quality -- all those debates about new shows on HBO and PBS and fX, such as "Is it a drama? A mini-series?" That all began with Upstairs Downstairs. The daily doings of a family of privilege holds our attention upstairs while the doings of the large staff that serve them fascinate us downstairs. It's a simple conceit that of course lesser shows like Downton Abbey emulate today. Blessed with boldness and some forced cast changes that kept the show nimble and fresh rather than falling into a predictable rhythm, Upstairs Downstairs remains a pure delight. This latest complete set is spruced up and also contains the complete season of the spin-off series Thomas & Sarah. That's a good bonus, even though T&S is strictly for fanatics. I'm definitely one of those since I even contain various spin-off novels based on certain seasons, others purporting to be diaries of a character and even a cookbook. I'm perplexed that this isn't a BluRay edition, but other than that have no complaints.

Many would name The Sopranos as one of the greats and for a while even THE greatest. It's been replaced for the moment by the shows du jour The Wire and Breaking Bad. For me, the show should have ended at season four, with that white-hot, knock-down, drag-out fight to end all fights between Tony and Carmela. The entire series was about a woman who realizes she's made a deal with the devil and has to choose between her comfortable life and her soul. It peaked perfectly...and then ran another two seasons, undermining the emotional journey they'd taken us on. Ah well. Yet for casual fans like myself and even those who can quote reams of

dialogue along with the characters, this BluRay set is very welcome. The show was always made with feature film quality. But now it truly wows you with impressive picture and sound, making the most of what was already a very handsome show. If you want to feel like you're seeing it with fresh eyes or are diving in for the first time, this is the way to go.

Sgt. Bilko is a good example of a blockbuster show praised at the time for its wit and charm. It starred Phil Silver as a huckster in the Army, always gambling and arranging schemes. He spoke so fast and the razzle dazzle came so fast and furious, you can imagine what a shock to the system it was to folks in the heartland. Andy Griffith he ain't. It feels a little stagey now, much like *The Honeymooners*. But that show has proven enduring while this one is, well not dated, but simply not as compelling as it should be. It doesn't have the polish of later shows and the wheeling and dealing feels a little repetitive. Week after week, it must have been fun. But watching any sitcom in gulps challenges the show and those with characters that grow and change hold up the best. Here you see a star setting off verbal fireworks and can readily know why it was a hit. But it now falls into that middle range of good not quite great shows like *Family Ties* and *The Bob Newhart Show*. (To which someone just said, "But I LOVE Bob Newhart!" I know, I know.

If you think *The Office* is one of the greatest TV shows of all time, why I agree with you...if you're referring to the UK original. If you're talking about the US version, no, not even close. On the other hand, I thought remaking the Ricky Gervais landmark was absolutely idiotic. And I was wrong in commercial terms and even in artistic ones, to a degree. The first two seasons of the US version were painful as they stood in the shadow of the original and even redid some of the scripts. Then they found their own rhythm and for two or three seasons created their own distinctive, sweeter spin on that original idea. It helps that they had terrific casting at the start by Allison Jones and Marla Garlin. Most everyone has gone on to success and deservedly so. It doesn't help that they drove the show into the ground with an entirely unnecessary eighth and ninth season. (Even season seven was pushing it.) But that's the story of most long-running shows so why should *The Office* be any different? It's a fascinating arc in a way, from an absurd remake of a masterpiece to a standing-on-its-own feet series of modest commercial success to a long-running hit dragged out to the bitter end after its star left because of a desperate network that was flailing in the ratings. There's drama for you! This set has what you would expect and if you're a rabid fan and looking to fill up your shelf, look no further.

*Merlin* is certainly one of the greatest fantasy TV shows of all time. But that's faint praise since TV has made almost no fantasy TV shows, ever. The reason in the past was special effects. You just can't do good dragons on a TV budget. That's less of a concern. Hence this *Smallville*-like look at the early days of King Arthur. It actually got better as it went along, though this is family entertainment through and through. Happily, it's not campy like most fantasy TV shows of the past, (I'm looking at you, *Hercules*), John Hurt does great voice work as the Dragon and after five years and 65 episodes, it may have ended just a little too soon. But better to leave 'em wanting more rather than wishing they had less.

### **LES BLANK -- ALWAYS FOR PLEASURE** (\$124.95 BluRay; Criterion)

So many of these boxed sets are about TV shows. So it's a pleasure to take a look at this lovingly assembled collection of documentary films and shorts by the great Les Blank. It's the sort of project Criterion excels at and they've done a great job. Blank died just last year but this tribute couldn't come soon enough. His eclectic tastes often led Blank to focus on two great loves: music and food. But he always used a widescreen perspective, capturing the times that created the culture where such arts could flourish. He tackled blues legend Lightning Hopkins, New Orleans, the lowly garlic and much much more. This collection brings together 14 films, a clutch of shorts, interviews with family, friends, contemporaries, and even an excerpt from an upcoming documentary about this trailblazer. You'll be hungry and thirsty and ready for a road trip with great tunes on tap after just a sampling of his oeuvre.

### **WKRP IN CINCINNATI COMPLETE SERIES** (\$139.99 DVD; Shout)

For countless shows, if you're wondering why such-and-such isn't available in a boxed set or in a decent version, the reason is quite often music rights. For most of TV history, no one thought to secure music rights. And while artists were happy to approve use of their music for a performance on a talk show or for a brief moment on a sitcom they imagined would come and go and rarely be seen again, it's quite a different matter when those episodes are collected in a permanent season or series boxed set. Music rights became so expensive -- not to mention just a nightmare to track down in the first place -- that many shows remained in limbo. WKRP In Cincinnati had the bad luck to be a sitcom about deejays at a rock and roll station, which meant it didn't work without current music. That was fine for the time but it's proven almost impossible to get out. Shout must have begged and pleaded and finally wore down all the interested parties because it has finally arrived with (almost) all the classic cues included. So you get the entire four seasons in their network broadcast versions (with some very slight edits in a very few cases). It was never a great show. But it was a broadly funny one with dreams of greatness that led to some surprising little subplots and moments of cynicism. The cast was good and Loni Anderson showed excellent comic timing in her Emmy nominated turn that would prove the role of a lifetime. It's almost a miracle this is available. You don't see a complete American Dreams available and that was done much more recently when everyone knew about these issues. Northern Exposure is still just a shadow of its former self. And so on. So congrats all around.

### **HISTORY PRESENTS THE DEFINITIVE WWI AND WWII COLLECTION (\$99.98 DVD; A&E)**

The History Channel has drifted so far afield from its nominal mission -- Ancient Aliens, Pawn Stars, etc. -- it's good to see a behemoth like this boxed set remind us of the good ole days when they were nicknamed the Hitler channel or the War channel for their relentless focus on seismic events like WW I and WW II. None of the documentaries here are the equal of the great TV war documentaries like Victory At Sea or Vietnam: A Television History (or of course Ken Burns with The Civil War). But by god they track down a whole lot of footage from the era! You get 20 discs containing everything from World Wars, 100 Years Of WW I, 75 Years Of WW II and WW II In HD. Insatiable military buffs -- even those who have watched these already -- will be in hog heaven.

### **TWILIGHT ZONE: THE 5TH DIMENSION (\$349.98 DVD; Image)**

### **DR WHO THE MATT SMITH YEARS (\$148.95 BluRay; BBC)**

### **DR. WHO SERIES 8 (\$99.98 BluRay out 12-9; BBC)**

Will The Twilight Zone ever return to TV? The real question is when. The Rod Serling anthology remains one of the great TV shows, utterly unique, influential and often imitated but never equaled. Not even close. (No, Night Gallery didn't do it.) So someday they'll have to create a new boxed set to contain everything here and whatever new iteration they come up with. For now, this is the whole megillah. You get the original series, the 1980s reboot and loads and loads of extras, including the very good American Experience documentary on Serling. The Twilight Zone has often set the standard for TV shows on disc so many fans have purchased many iterations of the show in the past. Most recently, single seasons came out on BluRay in excellent editions typically bursting with extras. It's a puzzle, to say the least, that this set isn't in BluRay. It feels like a step back, despite the addition of the 1980s series and a very handsome box that is a pleasure to look at and hold. But if for some reason you don't want BluRay or aren't willing to wait and you haven't purchased enough of the single seasons to care about buying them again, this is an excellent set. What's here is very good indeed, even if it makes less than complete sense in the grand scheme of things. (And though they've pretended to before, the folks behind big sitcoms like I Love Lucy and Seinfeld and shows like Twilight Zone invariably run scared from genuine collections of their greatest hits. It's a very, very short-sighted decision. One set that actually contained the 20 greatest episodes of a long-running sitcom or show like this would immediately become a must-have for most collectors. You're not hurting sales of elaborate boxed sets like this because of course most people will never plonk down for something like this unless they HAVE to have every single episode. A real "Greatest Hits" would raise the profile of the show and make it a more valuable property in the long run. Just saying.) If you

wanna wow someone and they love Twilight Zone but have never collected it, this will undoubtedly impress.

NOTE: The Twilight Zone came closer to its ideal greatest hits set earlier this year with a 17 episode collection dubbed The Twilight Zone: Essential Episodes (55th Anniversary Collection) (\$29.98 DVD; Image). This release passed me by. Fourteen of these episodes are widely named among its best of all time, while three ("The After Hours," "The Midnight Sun," "The Obsolete Man") are curious inclusions. They undoubtedly have their adherents, but googling around and looking at what Time and Paste and numerous other sources have said over the years, these go unnamed by most everyone while the other 14 are no-brainers. And when you have "Five Characters In Search Of An Exit," "The Lonely," "Twenty-Two," "Where Is Everybody," "Long Distance Call," "Person Or Persons Unknown" and if you wanna get quirky the hour long Robert Duvall episode "Miniature" to choose from, why get obscure? Still, this set is far superior to earlier attempts at such a genuine greatest hits set and 14 of the 17 are indeed stone cold classics most everyone would agree on. It's a great bargain and unquestionably the place to start for casual fans. Now where's that Seinfeld set?)

Unlike The Twilight Zone, it seems like the good Doctor has never gone away. But let's not forget the dark days of 1989 to 2005, years when there was no real Doctor except for a movie best forgotten. Then Russell T. Davies brilliantly resurrected the show. And no Doctor has proven more important than Matt Smith. Christopher Eccleston was there to revive it and we were just thrilled to have the Doctor back. Then David Tennant swooped in and immediately became the best Doctor of them all, even dare I say it better than my childhood Doctor of Tim Baker? He was better if only because he had better scripts, I hasten to add. Baker is still the image that pops into mind whenever the character is mentioned. Tennant was remarkable. I was shocked how quickly people immediately embraced Matt Smith as his equal if not even better. Have they no loyalty? But he was subtly different, goofier and really a joy. Plus he had even better scripts, especially a season long arc one year that deepened our appreciation for this quirky, maddening, delightful, daft, genocidal (??!!) figure of fantasy and fun. More importantly, he established once and for all that the Doctor is bigger than any one actor and we wouldn't have to spend our days wishing Tennant would return any more than we have to long for Sean Connery. Bonds will come and go but Bond remains. The same is true for the Doctor. This boxed set contains all of Smith's adventures and while he ends with a bit of a whimper, it's a wonderful ride. The extras are copious, the quality high, the entertainment good for the whole family (though the smallest kids may be too scared at times) and it's imminently re-watchable. Remember when we were worried Doctor Who wouldn't be Doctor Who if they had more than \$20 an episode to spend on special effects? That seems a long, long time ago.

As for the new Doctor, I like Peter Capaldi and I'm rooting for him. They had a very clever first episode that beat everyone to the punch by stating if you reject the Doctor because of his outward appearance, well you're a wanker. Well done, that. But the season has ended and I'm still rooting for Capaldi rather than actually cheering him. I've no idea what this take on the Doctor will be and I don't think anyone else has quite a handle on it either, beyond his being rather prickly. I like prickly. I am prickly. Bring on prickly. But it's not quite there yet, perhaps because they've yet to add a new facet (sexiness, youthful glee, etc.) to what we already know. I'll still be rooting next season but let's hope the hopefulness won't be necessary soon.

### **DOWNTON ABBEY SERIES 1-4 (\$109.99 BluRay; PBS)**

So you love Downton Abbey? Well, good. If for some reason you haven't purchased any of the previous sets, you may well want to snap up everything they've done...so far. Naturally, you're aware the show will run for at least two or three more seasons (and it will end then only because the creatives pull the plug). Some day there will be a very posh Complete Collection of the entire show. Mind you, they have to actually make the episodes before those shows can be collected, so no moaning about how you've been buying the show all along. Those complaints hold no water when you buy complete seasons as they make them. If you have, of course you can get Season 4 on its own. Some like to think Downton Abbey is the Upstairs Downstairs of its day. Not a chance. This is the Dallas of its day, a primetime soap with all the ludicrous plotting and inconsistent characters that

implies. The mad lunatic that is Julian Fellowes has proven he's incapable of keeping any emotional arc in place, repeating himself ad nauseam on some characters, putting others through the ringer again and again and generally toying with his creation like a petulant god. Ironically, the cast of *Downton* is so good that they make the show a little hard to enjoy. On a soap, you can enjoy the nutty plot twists thanks to actors that relish the campy high drama. Here, the cast is working at creating actual, genuine, real people, which makes the roller coaster that is their lives rather disconcerting and frustrating. And still we watch....

**M SQUAD COMPLETE SERIES** (\$79.97 DVD; Shout/Timeless Media)

**SECRET AGENT AKA DANGER MAN COMPLETE SERIES** (\$79.97 DVD out 12-9; Shout/Timeless)

M Squad is a just-the-facts cop show in the vein of *Dragnet*. What's the difference between the two? Star Lee Marvin can really act while Jack Webb was a wooden bore. M Squad is pure disposable tv, a half hour of crime, seedy characters and a tough talking cop who wrestles with the clues, does some grunt work and invariably collars the bad guy (or girl) by the credits. Chicago is the nominal setting so you get some shots of Marvin around the city skyline. But the main pleasure is the way he ambles through the show, his jaunty walk and angular arms flapping away as he tumbles into a chair or tosses off a line while walking out the door. The regulars are so good at jazzing up their delivery and giving it a natural, unforced air that it's a pleasure to watch them in action. The crimes tend to get rather repetitive after the high quality of the first few episodes, but Marvin is a joy throughout. No wonder this turned him into a star.

In a way, Patrick McGoohan turned *Secret Agent* into a star, even though his fortunes rose with it and allowed him to create his enduring masterpiece, *The Prisoner*. McGoohan was an exceptionally reluctant hero. You might scoff at the idea that he "turned down" James Bond for moral reasons. But when you find out he also turned down *The Saint* and that he only did *Secret Agent* (aka *Danger Man* in the UK) because they agreed to his stipulations, you start to believe the myth. Those stipulations? His fight scenes had to be unique. (McGoohan boxed and felt his skills were taken advantage of and becoming a bore.) His character had to use his wits and turn to a gun only as a last resort. And here's the kicker. No kissing. None. Not ever. (McGoohan was a very strict Catholic, apparently.) Can you imagine James Bond never kissing a beauty? No you cannot. McGoohan got what we wanted and the result is a half hour of harmless nonsense, complete with the globe-trotting that was de rigueur for the time on TV in spy shows. McGoohan has a reserve on camera that is compelling, but the show simply doesn't hold much interest beyond him. It did fine but ended after one season. Then Bond took off and McGoohan reluctantly agreed to return to the part. He last two more seasons (and a smidge beyond that), but walked away so he could do *The Prisoner*. *Secret Agent's* loss was our gain.

Both of these come from the Timeless Media imprint of Shout, an indication you can expect it won't be quite up to the rigorous standards of their premiere label. Rather cruelly, the pilots of both shows have been remastered and look smashing. Obviously, they couldn't afford to remaster every episode. The rest quickly decline to acceptable but not great quality, typical for what you would see in reruns on TV. If you're a fan of the show and just happy to see them at all, they'll be fine.

**VERA SERIES 4** (\$59.99 DVD; Acorn)

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

OK, I'm getting worried. No one can watch every show, but I certainly start with the ones that seem likeliest to be really good. But again, NO ONE can watch everything. For certain genres, I'll pass shows I'm not familiar with to someone who loves it. If they sample the show and sing its praises, I give it a go. Inevitably some fall through the crack. That's what happened with *Inspector George Gently* and I'm worried that happened with Brenda Blethyn's *Vera*. She plays a frumpy crime buster. Her professional acumen is brilliant and her personal life is non-existent. (Is there a single female copper anywhere in the world who is happily married? I think not.) I've never quite had the time to jump in but I keep hearing more and more interesting things about it and they keep making episodes and I think it's jolly well time I dove in.

That's what I did with Gently. This series is based on more than 40 novels, with each book providing the basis for a feature length episode. Anchoring the show is Martin Shaw as Gently and Lee Ingleby as his sidekick. They have marvelous chemistry, with Shaw as the implacable, righteous veteran and Ingleby as the corner-cutting junior member of the team. Like Vera, it's set in the north of England but unlike that contemporary show, this is set in the late 1960s. From the first, the show is exceptionally well cast and well acted in every role from top to bottom. But most shows start great and struggle to maintain it or are never great to begin with. Gently begins solidly and then by season three it's firing on all cylinders. The tech elements especially improve, with the visuals and score going from rudimentary to polished and movie-worthy. By seasons four and five, the show is truly great. Season six wasn't quite as good (the creator wasn't involved with the scripts and the directors weren't the best). But it was still strong. And the creator is back for season seven, which begins airing in the UK in February. If they return to the greatness of the last few years, this will officially become one of the best shows on the air, one of the all time greats in the crime drama and perhaps one of the best, period. We'll have to see where it ends up but the potential is there. It doesn't reinvent the wheel: this is a cop show, pure and simple. But it does what it does very, very well.

### **THE MERV GRIFFIN SHOW (1962-1986)** (\$129.98 DVD; MPI)

It's possible that TV talk shows are the best time capsule imaginable for the past 50 years of history. Their insatiable need for guests, for entertainment, for anything to fill up those endless hours means that damn near everyone will cross in front of a camera at some point. When I was a kid, Merv Griffin aired a show in the early afternoon. I watched, but I was cynical over his gushing style. Every single guest was a wonderful and dear personal friend who was the most talented creature on the planet. If you want to know where Jimmy Fallon came from, this is it. All talk shows are safe spaces for celebrities, but Griffin and Fallon are especially safe, which is why celebrities love them so. But while Fallon is an absolutely dreadful interview, Griffin is better than I remember. And his tastes range farther afield. Watch the complete episodes on this elaborate, nicely done boxed set and you'll see everything from Richard Pryor to Richard Nixon, from a young Whitney Houston to an aging Orson Welles. It's a lot more entertaining than I would have guessed based on my memory. Griffin may have gushed but he was a very savvy businessman who knew how to create successful talk and game shows. No fool he. And in subtle ways large and small, it shows. The Mike Douglas Show may have had more inventive programming but the episodes are well chosen and fun. It's a pity music rights and other issues keep this expensive. Given the vast number of episodes in the library (nearly 5000!), they should have offered twice as many episodes at half the price.

Griffin was smart so maybe his estate will do this: a cable channel (or web site) devoted to classic TV talk shows. Johnny Carson's estate has very smartly repackaged his interviews with stars for TCM and it's a proven delight. Very savvy people should comb through ALL the episodes and start tagging them by quality and topic/celebrity. A channel that had access to Griffin and Mike Douglas and Phil Donahue and all the others could chop up and slice and dice those interviews into endless permutations. You could chart a star's career with their best interviews from all the different shows offered chronologically. Another could gather together all the talent promoting a certain classic film, cherry picking the best chats both at the time and in the years after. TV debuts of stand-up comics, musical guests in various genres, silent film stars, stars on their marriages (or divorces), just writers, just directors, and on and on and on and on. Some episodes might offer nothing. Others might have two or three good segments. Most if you're lucky have one keeper. But that's maybe 5000 keepers from Griffin alone. Who knows what gems are there? Combing through and pulling out the best of the best and offering them in smart and clever ways could prove very lucrative. Get going! (And if you need a host, call me!)

**PEE-WEE'S PLAYHOUSE: THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$149.99 BluRay; Shout Factory) -- Don't forget about this gem of a series, whether it's for an adult friend with great and goofy taste or a kid. The show looks absolutely terrific thanks to a meticulous restoration. The wit and creativity, of course, remains as fresh as ever. [Here's a full review.](#)