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DVDs: Can Shia LaBeouf Play Indy?

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OK, I've been away for a few weeks so let's play catch up on some of the top DVD releases of the past four weeks.

Indiana Jones -- The new Indiana Jones movie clearly sets up Shia LaBeouf as the heir apparent. But he's got a big fedora to fill -- and I don't mean Harrison Ford. Three other actors have all played variations on Indy and they've all done great jobs. River Phoenix played young Indy in

the terrific opening segment of Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, which is finally available individually or as a new three-pack Indiana Jones: The Adventure Collection (\$59.98; Paramount). That same film features Sean Connery as older Indy via the role of Indy's dad. I still say Temple of Doom is underappreciated (It's a spoof, people!) but it is pretty notable that the third flick has such good actors to help you ignore the weak second half (just like the new film). And then of course there's Sean Patrick Flanery who tackled Indy for TV. The final set of that series is out -- The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles Volume 3 (\$129.99; Paramount) -- and now that the little tyke Indy is a distant memory, it does a great job of making him the Zelig of action heroes. The set is too expensive but the bonus documentaries really are substantial and fun. Phoenix plays a younger version of Ford, down to the stutter step running style. Flanery does something more complicated: He plays the young earnest, wide-eyed but adventurous kid who would become the slightly cynical person Jones turned into by the time of "Raiders." So LaBeouf has to follow Ford and Connery and Phoenix and Flanery. I'd rather face a giant rolling boulder about to crush me into pieces. Can LaBeouf do it?

All You Need Is Love (\$99.95; Isolde) -- I'd never heard of this British documentary covering the history of popular music but it's absolutely terrific -- a must-have for serious fans of music and documentaries. 17 episodes on five discs cover everything from swing and tin pan alley to the Beatles and beyond. Director Tony Palmer went everywhere and spoke to seemingly everyone, at

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least when he wasn't unearthing rare footage. If he stumbles a bit on the last episode when trying to spot the trends of tomorrow, well, who wouldn't? It originally aired in the late '70s through 1980 but seeing it all at once is a treat.

SNL Vs The Muppet Show -- Two great variety series are getting the deluxe treatment on DVD. *Saturday Night Live The Complete Third Season* (\$69.98; Universal) is simply scorching with talent and inventiveness. No, not everything works but even the things that don't are bold and reckless and absorbing. What's wrong with admitting that SNL began at a peak of brilliance that few other shows -- let alone SNL itself -- have ever matched? The proof is here. And *The Muppet Show Third Season* (\$39.99; Disney) is almost as anarchic and fun itself, thanks to guests like Pearl Bailey, Roy Rogers and Sylvester Stallone and regulars like Fozzie Bear.

Criterion -- The DVD releases I always gobble up immediately come from Criterion, which have always set the standard for DVD remastering and great extras that everyone else imitates. Two Louis Malle films -- *The Lovers* and *The Fire Within* (\$29.95 each) fill in the blanks on one of my favorite directors. But *The Thief Of Bagdad* with Sabu (\$39.95) is the real eye-popper with special effects that still delight today. Handmade really does beat digital. And Sabu was a stand-in for kids everywhere, not to mention a rare-dark-skinned hero who was allowed his dignity in old Hollywood. Loads of extras, of course.

Boxed Movie Sets -- *Rambo: The Complete Collector's Set* (\$54.95; Lionsgate) is out just in time to include Stallone's latest reboot. He was better on *The Muppet Show* but I'm surprised at how entertaining *Rambo II* remains. *Dirty Harry Ultimate Collector's Edition* (\$74.95; Warner Bros.) appears just as Clint Eastwood slammed the door on his starring as the vigilante cop ever again, saying at Cannes it would be ridiculous since obviously any cop his age would be retired. (Mind you, Angelina Jolie's joking suggestion that she would take up the series should be taken seriously by the studio as soon as possible.) You get all five movies, a hardcover book and even a replica of Harry Callahan's wallet. Surely hardcore fans would have preferred a replica of his gun. Even Callahan might think twice before crossing John Wayne, but I guess they'd both be beating up bad guys anyway, wouldn't they? You get some fine Wayne westerns with *John Wayne: The Fox Westerns Collection* (\$29.98; Fox), and *The Big Trail* from 1930 is very good, even though Wayne didn't really come into his own until *Stagecoach*. The others are from far later and have been on DVD before with more extras, which makes this set economical but annoying. It's far outshone by *Jimmy Stewart: The Westerns Collection* (\$39.98; Universal), which contains six movies, four of which are undeniable classics, including three great noir Westerns with Anthony Mann, including my favorite *Winchester 73*.

Boxed TV Shows -- You're late to the game if you think *Square Pegs: The Complete Series* (\$29.95; Sony) is underappreciated. This delightful sitcom about high school starring Sarah Jessica Parker and Jami Gertz was very well-reviewed when it came out, lamented when it was cancelled after just one season and a direct influence on *Freaks & Geeks*, et al. *Mission: Impossible Fourth Season* (\$49.99; Paramount) was less fun without Martin Landau and Barbara Bain and the complex scams were becoming a bit rote, but it was still fun. *Penn & Teller: Bullshit -- The Complete Fifth Season* (\$29.98; Showtime) remained as bilious as ever, thanks to a never-ending supply of what they consider the bullshit of others. *Absolutely Fabulous -- Absolutely Everything* (\$129.98; BBC Video/Warner Bros.) on the other hand shows a modest decline over the years (you can only make drunken tirades funny so many times before repeating yourself), but it's still a keeper of a series and demands a luxurious boxed set if only to maintain the over-the-top attitude of the show itself. And while I'm pleased that *The Incredible Hulk Third and Fourth Seasons* (\$39.98 each; Universal) are out and I remain adamant that Bill Bixby did a great job (now where is his show as a magician?), I do have to admit it got a bit silly. So many shows like *Hulk* and *Lost* and *Twin Peaks* would have been better off as a miniseries or season-long telenovela that came to a definite end. And one of the great miniseries of them all -- *Holocaust* (\$39.99; Paramount) -- is finally out on DVD, though without the extras one would have expected for a landmark series. I assume this 1978 Emmy winner would have been unthinkable if it weren't for the phenomenal success of *Roots* one year earlier. (On the other hand, since it came out just one year later, it's possible *Holocaust* was greenlighted before *Roots* was shown.) An amazing cast including Michael Moriarty, James Woods and Joseph Bottoms and I don't even feel guilty anymore for feeling bewitched by Meryl Streep amidst all this horror.

Blu-Ray -- Pick a movie, any movie, and you can bet that most major new releases are coming out on Blu-Ray, including the disappointing sequel *National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets* (\$34.99;

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Buena Vista) for a deluxe edition or \$29.99 for a single disc edition of a movie that couldn't recapture the surprise pleasures of the original. However, the Blu-Ray version is \$69.98 for the two disc set. Do the studios really think people are going to be eager to pay TWICE as much if not more for the pleasures of Blu-Ray? They're crazy and should realize that the higher quality picture should be a nice extra feature at no extra cost to keep people in the habit of buying DVDs. But if you do want a Blu-Ray title, make it *Master and Commander: The Far Side Of The World* (\$39.98; Fox), a sensational film that brilliantly captured the charm of a classic series of novel and cries out for a sequel. We've no right to ask Russell Crowe to take a pay cut, but if he wanted a sequel to be made (preferably with the same director and cast, including Paul Bettany), then surely it would get made. Take a cut of the gross, Mr. Crowe and reap the benefits. It would be a shame to see no more adventures of Aubrey and Maturin.

Eclipse Series -- Almost as giddy-inducing for film buffs as a new Criterion release are their adventurous outpourings of rarities on the no-frills Eclipse series. I'll take the social critiques of William Klein who has three surreal stabs at hypocrisy in a boxed set (\$44.95; Eclipse/Criterion) over the more mannered, high-falutin' Godard any day, even if *Pierrot Le Fou* (\$39.95; Criterion) has more extras.

Elizabeth Gaskell -- She doesn't have the drawing power of Charles Dickens or Anthony Trollope, but Gaskell has been inspiring excellent adaptations from her novels, the latest of which is *Cranford*. Catch up with all three miniseries in *The Elizabeth Gaskell Collection* (\$79.98; BBC Video), which includes the just-out *Cranford*, *North and South* and the little-discussed but very entertaining *Wives and Daughters*.

Frank Sinatra -- Very few if any artists can claim the record Sinatra has in both music and film (only Bing Crosby, really). And the anniversary of his death has prompted the release of three boxed sets. My favorite is *The Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly Collection* (\$24.98; Warner Bros.) which has three outstanding musicals, including the landmark classic (and perhaps my favorite movie musical of them all) *On The Town*. *Frank Sinatra: The Early Years* (\$39.98; Warner Bros.) has five so-so movies and shows Frankie learning on the job. *Frank Sinatra: The Golden Years* (\$39.98; Warner Bros.) is better, with five stronger films including the dated but still powerful *The Man With The Golden Arm*. MGM released *The Manchurian Candidate* in a boxed set last year, Columbia has *From Here To Eternity* and Warner's earlier release *The Rat Pack Collection* (\$39.95; Warner Bros.) is for suckers -- they had fun makin' em, but you won't have fun watchin' em.

Control -- Finally, one of the best films of 2007 comes out on DVD (\$28.95; Weinstein) and looks better than ever, thanks to spot-on imagery from director Anton Corbijn and a great central performance from Sam Riley as doomed Joy Division singer Ian Curtis. If his life weren't such a remarkably lock-step journey down the cliched path of rock star destruction, the movie might be appreciated even more.

So tell me, do you think Shia LaBeouf can take over the Indy franchise? At the very least, he should demand they change his nickname -- "Mutt" is just pathetic.

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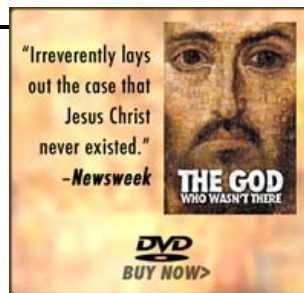
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