

August 29, 2012

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**Michael Giltz**

Freelance writer

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# DVDs: *Downton Abbey* Has Gone Down, Down, Down in Quality

Posted: 02/ 9/2012 5:02 pm

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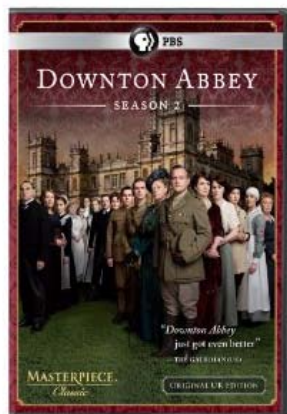
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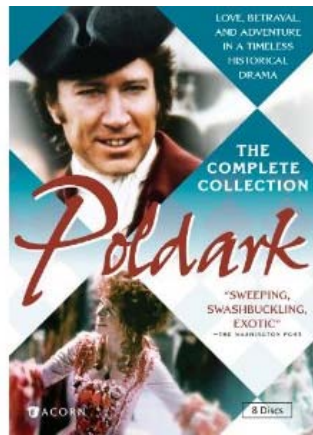
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**DOWNTON ABBEY SEASON TWO** (\$49.99 BluRay; PBS)

**POLDARK THE COMPLETE COLLECTION** (\$79.99; Acorn) -- Don't tell my mother, but *Downton Abbey* has swiftly declined from a pale imitation of the original *Upstairs Downstairs* to a pale imitation of *Falcon Crest*. She's enjoying the show but I quickly switched from eagerness to see if the second season could build on the over-praised first to laughter at its foolishness to boredom. The first season lifted entire plot lines from U/D (and shamelessly from *Mrs. Miniver*) but it was fun. This season it has gone completely off the rails, with episodes ending with soap-like revelations (complete with "da-dum!" foreboding musical cues), characters behaving utterly without rhyme or reason from one moment to the next. Why, for example, has Isobel Crawley gone from a sensible if blunt woman to a blithering idiot? The plot twists come so fast and furious all you can do is laugh. But they keep coming at a ludicrous pace, until even the guilty pleasure is drained out of it. Having seen the entire season, trust me -- it doesn't pull itself together. Maggie Smith still manages to swat down one-liners with aplomb, but the rest of the fine cast is thoroughly at a loss. You'd be much better off watching *Poldark*, an earlier generation's PBS sensation. This has all the pleasures of *Downton*, including the period setting and juicy storylines. But it's intelligently done and the characters don't change from moment to moment and it all wraps up nicely in two seasons (even though there were many more books for them to draw upon.) *Downton*, I fear, is going to be with us for many years to come.




**LADY AND THE TRAMP** (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Disney) -- It's a knee jerk reaction to refer to every single Disney animated film as a classic. But right below the top-tier of *Snow White* and *Pinocchio* and others, you'll find the second tier of very good films that are charming and have stood the test of time -- even if they're not stone cold masterpieces. In that group resides *Lady and the Tramp*, a sweet and charming tale bolstered by Peggy Lee's terrific songs and one of the most romantic kisses in screen history. No wonder it's on the cover of this set, which looks great and features the strong extras that a Disney production deserves.



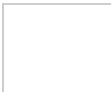
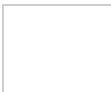
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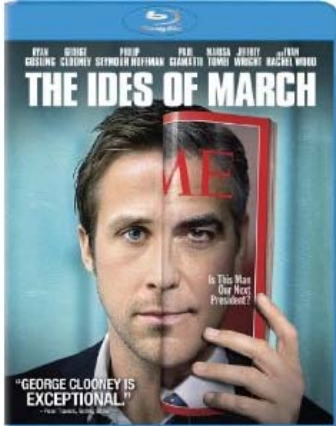
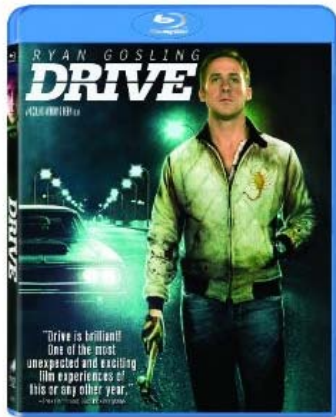
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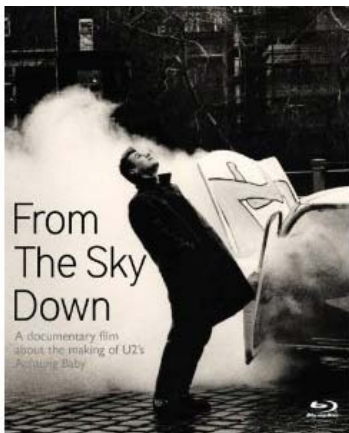
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**DRIVE** (\$39.99 BluRay; Sony)

**THE IDES OF MARCH** (\$35.99 BluRay; Columbia) -- Actor Ryan Gosling had the sort of year every savvy actor longs for when building a career. He co-starred in the popular romantic comedy *Crazy Stupid Love* and garnered attention for both his abs and his comedic chops. Then he took the cool character study *Drive* to Cannes where it received tons of acclaim for critics, launching a pretty good box office run as well as Oscar talk for his co-star Albert Brooks. He wound it up with the political drama *The Ides Of March*, which did in fact garner an Oscar nomination for director George Clooney's screenplay. All Gosling needs now is an out-and-out hit (or better yet franchise he can call his own, à la Matt Damon's *Bourne* films) and he'll be able to continue making the smart, bold films he wants for years to come.



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**HOT ON TWITTER**

1 of 2



**feliciaday**

Think on it: Cambridge scientists say all mammals, birds, many others including octopi, have human-like consciousness. <http://t.co/aF6W2ZQh>

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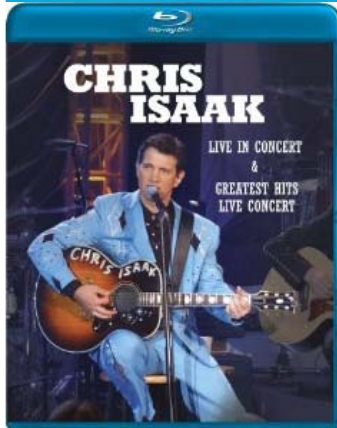
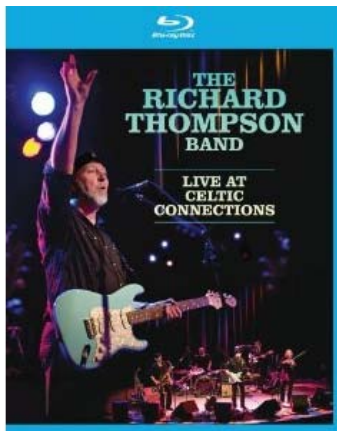


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**U2: FROM THE SKY DOWN** (\$24.98 BluRay; Island/Universal)

**THE RICHARD THOMPSON BAND: LIVE AT CELTIC CONNECTIONS** (\$19.98 BluRay; Eagle Rock)

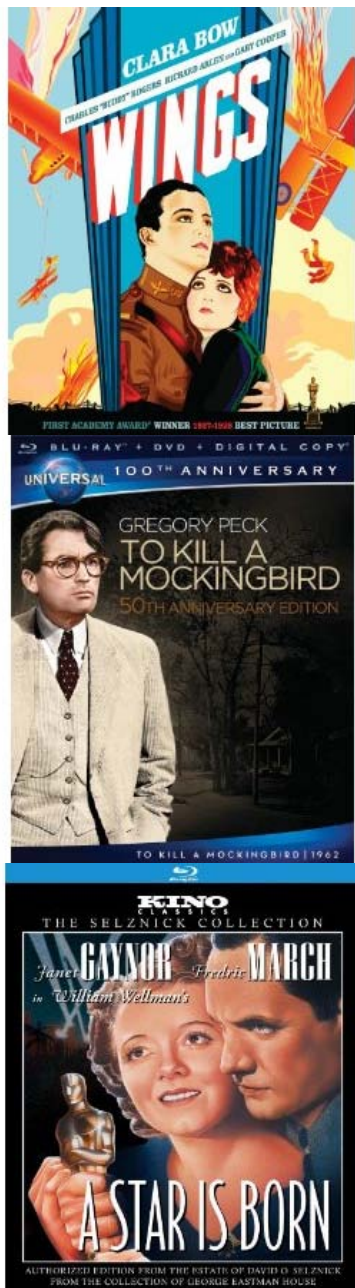
**CHRIS ISAAK LIVE IN CONCERT/GREATEST HITS LIVE** (\$17.97 BluRay; Image)

**X: THE UNHEARD MUSIC** (\$16.95; Angel Media/MVD)

**TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS: LIVE IN CONCERT** (\$17.97 BluRay; Image) -- The U2 documentary is a fine straightforward documentary that appeared in the lavish reissue of *Achtung Baby*. This edition is longer than that one, which seems pretty cruel if you forked over more than \$100 for the set. Still, it's a solid look at a turning point in the band's career, albeit strictly for fans of the band already. Richard Thompson is a sterling live act and one of my all-time favorites, but this concert is for his album *Dream Attic*, which is not one of his best. Since the concert leans so heavily on it, this show is simply good and doesn't scale the peaks Thompson so often does. Chris Isaak has quietly gone about amassing a chunk of great singles, but this awkward combination of two concerts contains three songs that appear on both (a lot when the shows only include 11 or 12 tunes). He's fun and in good voice but deserves a better live document. Unlike U2, the LA band X delivered a really memorable documentary about their group before calling it a day, though *X: The Unheard Music* has been overlooked for years, thanks to its lack of availability. This fine new set with extras should remedy that. Finally, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers are a legendary live act, but like Springsteen, they've never been well captured on film. The same, sadly, is true here of this fine but unremarkable performance for *Soundstage*.



**A VERY HAROLD & KUMAR CHRISTMAS** (\$35.99; Warner Bros.) -- Maybe it was the holiday season, but this third H&K movie got closer to the sweet spirit of the original than the rather sour sequel. And of course there can never be enough of Neil Patrick Harris in self-mocking, lady-killer mode. Though the 3-D was used extensively in theaters, for some odd reason it's just kind of dumbly amusing to see all sorts of things flying out at the camera even in 2-D. Will there be a fourth? Of course there will be a fourth.



**WINGS** (\$29.99 BluRay; Paramount)

**TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD 50TH ANNIVERSARY** (\$26.98 BluRay; Universal)

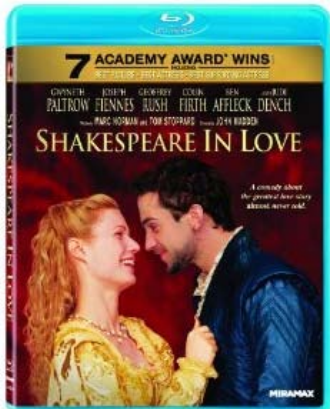
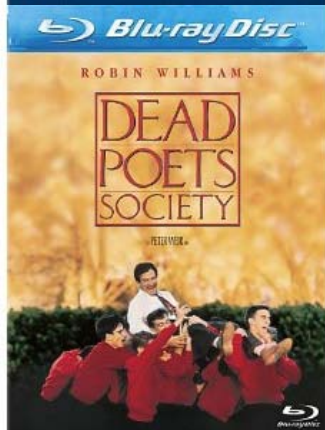
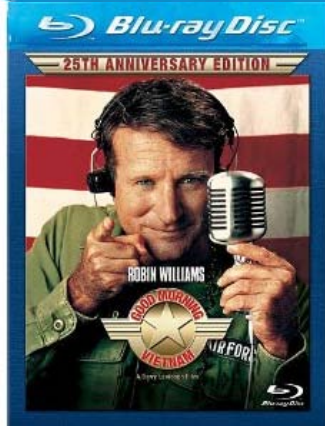
**A STAR IS BORN 1937** (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino)

Wings was the last silent film (indeed the only silent film) to win the Oscar for Best Picture and it's also memorable for one of the great screen debuts -- Gary Cooper makes a tremendous impression in a small role as a doomed pilot. It may soon be joined by the silent homage *The Artist* in that rare category. This nicely restored BuRay showcases the still fun if creaky movie and kicks off a series of Paramount restorations. *To Kill A Mockingbird* is also beautifully presented by Universal, which makes sense for one of the films that truly deserves the word beloved. I like it better than the book but have never been crazy about either (it's usually good to keep that to yourself on a first date; I can't tell you how often people say, "But that's my favorite book!") And *A Star Is Born* is always ripe for remake, but the Janet Gaynor and Frederick March edition is too often overshadowed by the Judy Garland and James Mason take. This sharp-looking restoration is good though the all-but absent extras are not up to standard for a movie with this strong of a history.



**TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF THE MOON** (\$54.99 3-D BluRay combo; Paramount)

**REAL STEEL** (\$39.99 BluRay; Touchstone/Disney) -- Why *Transformers* continues to make loads of money is beyond me. I understand fans turning out for the original and then seeing the sequel with hopes it might be better. But surely by the time of this third edition, it's clear the noisiest and dumbest franchise around can't be bothered to do anything but smash things together. The 3-D was pointless in the theater, frankly and it might even be marginally less tiresome to watch the movie on 2-D at home than with the glasses. That doesn't however make the movie any good. *Real Steel* at least bothered to come up with a plot, albeit a hackneyed one about a dad finding common ground with his estranged son by building and fighting robot boxers. Hugh Jackman has terrible taste in scripts (or needs a manager who does). To go from this to appearing on Broadway where he can sing "Stepping Out" and then be greeted by literally thousands of adoring fans afterwards...well, it's a miracle if he ever makes a movie again.



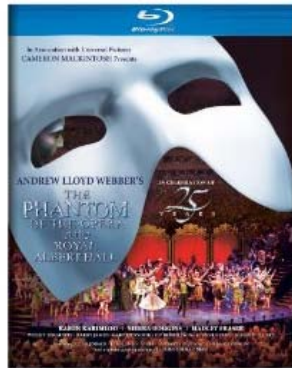
**SID & NANCY** (\$24.99 BluRay; MGM/Fox)

**GOOD MORNING VIETNAM** (\$19.99 BluRay; Touchstone/Disney)

**DEAD POETS SOCIETY** (\$19.99 BluRay; Touchstone/Disney)

**SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE** (\$14.99 BluRay; Miramax) -- First let me note the happy fact of falling prices for BluRay. I never thought they should have been priced a penny more than DVDs and it's nice to see classic titles coming out at \$15 and \$20 price points, with sale prices even lower. Gary Oldman would be my pick for best actor this year for his work on *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. But he's been wowing us for decades, including his marvelously unhinged immersion into the role of Sid Vicious. Robin Williams tore

it up in the uneven *Good Morning Vietnam* but wisely got out-of-the-way in *Dead Poets* and ceded the stage to the talented young students led by Robert Sean Leonard and Ethan Hawke. Finally, *Shakespeare In Love* is often seen as lighter fare that robbed *Saving Private Ryan* of its Best Picture Oscar, but it's a fun romp and holds up quite nicely thank you.



**THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL** (\$39.98 BluRay; Universal) -- In a few days, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom* will celebrate its 10,000th performance on Broadway and has just passed its 25th anniversary in existence. This lavish one-time staging at the Royal Albert Hall is a live performance starring Ramin karimloo and Sierra Boggess for broadcast around the world. It avoids the sterility of the Joel Schumacher film and adds a little oomph to a show so many people have seen in person already. I'll take the music of *Cats*, *Evita* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* over this, but virtually everyone else in the world seems to disagree with me. If you like it, this is a fine live version.

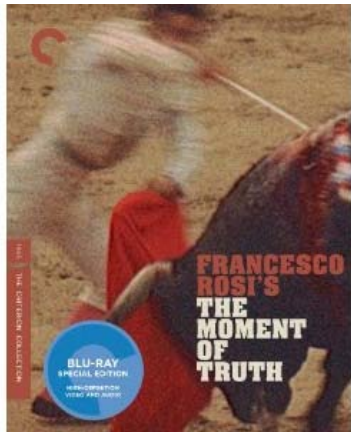


**POIROT SERIES 1** (\$49.99 BluRay; Acorn)

**STAR TREK THE NEXT GENERATION: THE NEXT LEVEL** (\$22.99 BluRay; Paramount) -- I've seen David Suchet's definitive performance as Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, but I was not there at the start. So I'm very excited to begin this series at the beginning and follow him all the way through from the first mystery they broadcast ("The Adventure Of The Clapham Cook") right down to the final whatever (Suchet is determined to film every single Poirot tale, whatever its origin). I don't think Poirot fans are obsessed with picture quality, but the BluRay looks very good. It's a pity they couldn't have put out a massive boxed set with, say, half of the entire run in chronological order in one place, rather than dribbling out these season by season releases for a show that has been on so long. But you can't have everything...unless you're a *Star Trek* fan. Paramount is determined to give you what you want and surely those fans do care about hi-def. This teaser set contains three episodes from *ST: TNG* converted into

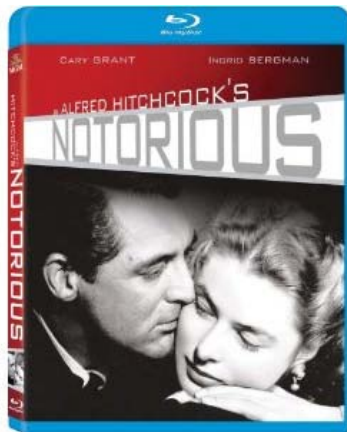


high-definition and the results are pretty stunning as far as the level of detail now visible. it's sure to get fans chomping at the bit for the BluRay released of the entire series after such careful remastering.



**THE MOMENT OF TRUTH** (\$29.99 BluRay; Criterion)

**THREE POPULAR FILMS BY JEAN-PIERRE GORIN** (\$44.95; Eclipse/Criterion) -- I've never enjoyed my homework more than now when it comes from Criterion. When other labels reissue movies, it's usually films I've seen like *Shakespeare In Love* and *To Kill A Mockingbird*. But when Criterion reissues a movie, it's sometimes a movie I'm completely unfamiliar with but am certain to find fascinating. I can't wait to get to the bullfighting drama *The Moment Of Truth*, by Italian director Francesco Rosi, starring real-life matador Migeulin. I can only assume that Hemingway loved it. And from their marvelous Eclipse series comes three documentaries by Gorin that focus on twin sisters, model train enthusiasts and a Samoan street gang. All from the 1980s and all of which are completely new to me -- for any other label, that might be concerning. But when Criterion takes the time to put it out, it's certain to be worth your time too.





**NOTORIOUS**  
**REBECCA**  
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**ANNIE HALL**

**THE APARTMENT** (\$24.99 each on BluRay; MGM) -- I've reviewed a string of old movies that were reissued in the last few weeks -- *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *A Star Is Born*, *Wings* and so on. I've casually mentioned that they look good to great. It's easy to take for granted the work and expense that needs to go into those releases so they do look good...but not when you're faced with lazy work done here. This batch of six titles from the MGM library are all on BluRay and trust me, these are not restorations or even remasterings but just whatever print was available slapped onto Bluray and then given the insulting tagline "The Ultimate high-Definition Experience." Uh, hardly, not when my years-old DVDs look virtually the same. The beginning of Woody Allen's *Manhattan* is one of the most famed openers in film history and should stun you with its lavish black and white. Here it looks grainy and ugly, as if smog has descended on New York. After all these years, you'd think they'd want to do it right. The same is true with every other film here; they are at best no better than the most recent DVD releases. That's puzzling to say the least since by now studios realize the value in their film libraries and few directors are more popular than Alfred Hitchcock. But here he have one of his best (*Notorious*), one of his worst (*Spellbound*) and a work-for-hire that won Best Picture (*Rebecca*) all delivered with indifference. Ditto Woody Allen's *Manhattan* and *Annie Hall*, as well as Billy Wilder's coruscating *The Apartment*. I would have two or three of these six films on my all-time best list. But if you already own them, there's no reason to buy these BluRays. And if you don't own them, buy a used or new DVD at a cheaper price and wait until they do it right.

MOST TITLES LISTED HERE WILL BE AVAILABLE IN MULTIPLE FORMATS AND IN MULTIPLE COMBINATIONS, INCLUDING DVD, BLURAY, DIGITAL DOWNLOAD, VOD, STREAMING AND THE LIKE. THE FORMAT LISTED IS THE FORMAT PROVIDED FOR REVIEW, NOT ALL THE FORMATS AVAILABLE. IT IS OFTEN THE MOST EXPENSIVE VERSION WITH THE MOST EXTRAS. DO CHECK INDIVIDUAL TITLES FOR AVAILABILITY IN ALL THEIR VARIOUS GUISES AND PRICE POINTS.

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**Note:** Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs and BluRays with the understanding that he would be considering them for review. Generally, he does not guarantee to review and he receives far more titles than he can cover.

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**Sombreuil Mongrel**  
35 Fans

04:38 PM on 02/14/2012

Time to revive "The Pallisers"!

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**antaeus**  
*Marriage Equality Is Here*  
1262 Fans

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12:24 AM on 02/14/2012

Agree. DOWNTOWN started off well last season, except for the MINIVER plagiarism, but this season has been cheap soap opera cliché. Really disappointing. I am surprised that the same writer who gave us GOSFORD PARK has stooped to this.

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**XRayspex000**  
1 Fans

10:33 AM on 02/13/2012

Nice to see a mention of "The Unheard Music" but I have to inform you that ~X~ have not called it a day - they've been on tour pretty much constantly since last year, including a trip to South America opening for Pearl Jam. They just haven't recorded new music since the 90s - but thanks for the mention of a truly great documentary of a truly great band.

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**DiscerningOne**  
5 Fans

10:11 AM on 02/11/2012

Thanks for mentioning Poldark which stands up pretty well despite being made 35 years earlier! Since it was based on Winton Graham's novels, the character development was carefully thought through! In those days they didn't use music to tell you what to think all the time. It was shot with multi-cameras too, so they performed it like a play which gives each scene a driving energy.

Poldark fans might like to know that the star, Robin Ellis, is also a blogger, focused on life in rural France, cooking and healthy eating--especially for people with Type 2 diabetes. His approach is the opposite of Paula Deen's. <http://robin-ellis.net/> You can find him on Facebook too.

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**ponderingmuch**  
706 Fans

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12:39 AM on 02/11/2012

I only read the part about Downton Abbey, and I will just say this: Upstairs Downstairs was fairly engaging at the time it came out, but the production values are so outdated it is very hard to watch at this point. The downstairs was far more interesting than the upstairs in that series.

Downton Abbey's plot is good enough to keep it going, however derivative, but it is the delightfulness of the characters, both up and down, as well as the beauty of the place, the art direction, the costumes, the props! that make it fully engaging to me. It is GORGEOUS!!!

I didn't say to you. I just said to me.

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**phoebequeen**  
*I blame the dog*  
705 Fans

08:51 PM on 02/10/2012

I disagree. I am thoroughly enjoying this period piece. It's fascinating to see how life was for the uber rich during this time. Can not imagine having servants to do everything for you. The life of the royals still revolve around much of the same treatment I imagine.

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**kilbyhanna**  
17 Fans

07:18 PM on 02/10/2012

At least I'm not the only person who thinks Downton isn't so great this 2nd season. The long-lost heir sent me over the edge.

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**catcancook**  
*Obama/Biden 2012*  
741 Fans

01:18 PM on 02/10/2012

Downton Abbey is so fab! Master Piece Theater is delivering a series that beats everything on TV imo. I can't wait for the 3rd season with Shirley McClain.

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**HUFFPOST SUPER USER**  
**Diana Scrimger**  
7 Fans

12:40 PM on 02/10/2012

We have really enjoyed watching Downton Abbey. It is just too classy for the people that like all the reality tv shows that we have on TV today. There are some TV shows that are plain boring to watch. This just proves that there is a generation gap when it comes to what is considered quality Television. Americans will fight to keep their quality PBS TV shows! Whether they like it or not!

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**Gloria Gifford**  
206 Fans

03:40 AM on 02/10/2012

DOWNTON ABBEY is still quality television with exceptional actors/characters that continue to be absorbing. I am thoroughly thrilled that there will be a third season. Ah, critics - they can't do it but they can sure knock it.

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**HUFFPOST BLOGGER**  
**Michael Giltz**  
*freelance writer*  
127 Fans

04:38 AM on 02/10/2012

Hi Gloria, thanks for commenting; you're certainly one of many who is enjoying the show and glad for a third season. I'd much rather hear your defense of the show rather than the tired old complaint that anyone who criticizes anything is just a whiny critic who can't actually write a novel/make a movie/record an album, etc. it is indeed a talented cast, but the plot twists are so absurd now. SPOILER through last week's episode seven: Matthew has gone from being paralyzed to feeling a twinge to leaping to his feet and dancing in about three episodes. Edith falls in love with her third man and even though he's supposed to be the long-lost and presumed dead fiance of Mary, as far as I can tell Mary doesn't even exchange a single private word with him but vehemently denies he could be that man and on and on. It just became too daytime soapy for me. Have you ever seen the original Upstairs, Downstairs? The first season is a little slow, but it's ultimately a great series you might like as well.

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**HUFFPOST SUPER USER**  
**MeinNH**  
*Ooooo Silly Me*  
1549 Fans

08:59 AM on 02/10/2012

So what if..... "Matthew has gone from being paralyzed to feeling a twinge to leaping to his feet and dancing in about three episodes, Edith falls in love with her

third man and even though he's supposed to be the long-lost and presumed dead fiancée of Mary, as far as I can tell Mary doesn't even exchange a single private word with him but vehemently denies he could be that man and on and on...." It is entertainment not rocket science.

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**HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR**  
**AIIShooKUp**  
*Hug A Hater*  
**2803 Fans**

03:32 PM on 02/14/2012

The timeline in the series is awfully fast. They went from the aftermath of the Titanic to the end of WWI in the blink of an eye. They'll be into the 20's at the start of series 3. So it's entirely possible that Matthew got well over a period of months if not years. And nobody ages. I can see why so many have issues with this season, but all the same, I'm still enjoying it.

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**MikeDu**

*Both salubrious and lugubrious concurrently.*  
**2649 Fans**

03:29 AM on 02/10/2012

I tried to get interested in the program but it seemed less like a show about people and more about stereotypes from every period movie ever made. Awhile ago i jokes that British dramas seem to "start" with whatever period costumes they can locate, then characters & plots are built-up around them. Every time I tuned in to that show I hit on a scene with the camera framed to feature the costume while the wearer looks meaningfully over her shoulder.

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**maudtheriault**  
**0 Fans**

12:11 AM on 02/10/2012

"Downton Abbey has gone down, down, down in quality". Apparently, so has proof reading.

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**HUFFPOST BLOGGER**  
**Michael Giltz**  
*freelance writer*  
**127 Fans**

04:39 AM on 02/10/2012

As soon as I saw the typo, I just knew this very joke would be made. Thanks for pointing out the error. I am my only proof reader, which leads to the very mistakes you see when I post and must dash before giving it a final read.

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**tam2128**  
**7 Fans**

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05:35 PM on 02/09/2012

Michael, I totally agree about the 'Downton downturn'. Pee-yew. It is getting to be a total waste of time. The good news for me is I discovered the new Sherlock, that airs right after DA. Very entertaining and well acted. DA is over-rated by most viewers. I'm looking forward to seeing U/D .It's on tonight. It was on when I was a kid but I don't remember much of it.

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**HUFFPOST BLOGGER**  
**Sal Nunziato**  
**58 Fans**

04:55 PM on 02/09/2012

If you begin listening to Richard Thompson's "Dream Attic" at track 5, "Here Comes Geordie," it's a must better record.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

**Michael Giltz**

*freelance writer*

**127 Fans**

04:40 AM on 02/10/2012

Many said a similar thing about my debut novel: if you skipped the chapters and went right to the afterword, it wasn't so bad.

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August 29, 2012

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**Michael Giltz**

Freelance writer

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## NYMF 2012 Roundup #4: Cool Cats and Chlorine in New Musicals

Posted: 07/24/2012 7:55 pm

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*This is the fourth in a series of roundups covering shows appearing in the [New York Musical Theatre Festival](#), or [NYMF](#). Every year I attend as many shows as I can and invariably see one or two that will rank among the best of the year, as well as discovering some new talented performers and behind the scenes artists*

*I'll want to keep an eye on in future productions. Go to the [NYMF](#) website for more info on inexpensive tickets.*

[HOW DEEP IS THE OCEAN?](#) \*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\*

[CENTRAL AVENUE BREAKDOWN](#) \*\*\*

[HOW DEEP IS THE OCEAN?](#) \*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\*

[THE THEATRE AT ST. CLEMENT'S](#)

Pianist and singer [Peter Cincotti](#) has a new album out but he hasn't saved all the best melodies for *Metropolis*. Happily, this collaboration with his sister Pia (she wrote the book) proves Cincotti also has a gift for theatrical numbers that move the story along, reveal character and have memorable melodies. With some work to focus and tighten the silly but endearing book, this could become an offbeat charmer.

The story is goofy in the extreme. Rob (a winning Eric Leviton) is a genius when it comes to cleaning and chlorinating pools. He doesn't make a lot of money but boy does he love his job. So when the pollution-damaged waters of the Jersey Shore threaten the livelihood of his friends at Monmouth Beach, it's no surprise that Rob comes up with a winning formula to chlorinate the ocean and save the day.

The only problem? His one-time pal and secret arch enemy Andy (Aaron Ramey) who throws a spanner in the works, hoping to win acclaim for himself and woo away Rob's wife Jackie (Michelle Federer). That may not be so hard -- in one of the show's best numbers, she complains that Rob's fixation on pools leaves her feeling "Second Best."

This sounds too dumb for words, until people start singing. Musicals can make even oddball ideas like this one...well, sing. The jaunty opener sets the mood quickly, Rob's "What More Do I Need" is catchy in a Billy Joel manner (Cincotti isn't afraid of a catchy melody like so many theater composers), "If She Were Mine" deftly lets us know Andy's simmering resentment and before you know it you're caught up in

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**Bill Moyers**

[WATCH: Both Parties Give Invisible Americans the Silent](#)

the tale. Other highlights include "With That Kind Of Money," "Time For Andy," and "Handyman From Heaven." That's a lot of highlights for any show.

Along with those strong melodies, the strength of this show is the excellent cast. Leviton does a great job with the regular Joe Rob and Federer is believable as his no-nonsense wife. She gets frustrated at his occasional dimness but gosh she loves the lug. That's not so easy to get across, but Federer does it easily. Best of all is Ramey as the scheming Andy. His excellent voice and Tool Time persona make him perfect for the frustrated friend of Rob. Ramey wisely never overplays the villainy, which roots the whole silly venture in a realistic vein. All the supporting players are fun in their various roles, from Amanda Bruton as a pal of Jackie to Joseph Ryan Harrington as the Kid to [Anthony Festa](#), who makes you wish the beach were always open for swimming.

Edward Pierce does a good job with the scenic design, though the pool represented by a rod with hanging down algae is a minor disappointment. (Surely something more imaginative could be created.) Choreographer Wendy Seyb keeps her not so limber cast moving nicely and directors Jeremy Dobrish and Gina Rattan oversee it all with keep-it-moving economy.

Now the areas that need work. Rob sings about 17 odes to the joys of chlorine when really we only needed one. Ditto the flashbacks to childhood where Rob is constantly playing with chlorine; he's constantly being yelled at and told there's not future in chlorine. We get it; he's crazy about pool cleaning.

The requiems for a whale which are interspersed are meant to underline the pollution in the ocean I guess, but they feel out of place and slow the action down.

A key flashback is botched: we see Rob and Andy back when they were partners in the pool cleaning business. About the only essential idea we've learned about Rob is that he's a sweetheart and loves cleaning pools. But in the flashback suddenly he's lazy on the job (and not because he's caught up in the raptures of chlorine) and even seems to take credit when Andy deserves it as well. He's not much of a team player and we can understand why Andy resents him. But that's surely not the point. Far better if we saw Andy shirking his duties and taking advantage of Rob even back then without Rob actually knowing it. Seeing Rob still get the girl and credit for his skills would be the festering sore for Andy, not a genuine resentment of a slob who didn't do his fair share of the work. That just throws the show out of whack.

Even worse is the flashback that shows Rob responsible for the death of his mother presumably because he over-chlorinated the pool. I kept waiting for another flashback where we'd find out the youthful Andy was actually responsible (unintentionally, I imagined). But no, Rob killed his mom? Huh? This feels wildly out of place in the show. That might create a problem for the song where the ghost of Rob's mom comes back in the form of a black woman to sing him a clue to his conundrum over how to properly chlorinate the ocean. But not really -- just have his wife prepare him some food so Rob can complain his late mother made it better. "Well, let her make it for you then" she can complain loudly. This could add to their friction and poof, you've got a dream sequence ready to go. I'd also add an earlier hint of Rob's affection for a certain sitcom to make a late show surprise (quite a fun one) not seem so far out of left field. If a celeb's not available down the road, let the actress playing his mom play him too.

So straightening out the back story, focusing the tension between Rob and Andy, cutting the grisly fact of Rob's matricide, removing the whale funeral music, and letting just one or two references to chlorine stand in for the hundreds already filling the show and you've got yourself a breezy silly show with great roles for non-traditional leads (ie. guys who ain't so young or pretty anymore). Here's hoping that the Cincottis have caught the musical theater bug.

### **CENTRAL AVENUE BREAKDOWN \*\*\* SIGNATURE THEATRE**

This is the return of *Central Avenue Breakdown*, which I first saw at NYMF in 2011. [Here's my original review](#).

The story remains the same: a family moves to Los Angeles with the dream of seeing dad William make it big on the jazz scene. In a painful scene that's more subtle and effective this time around, we realize he's just outclassed. That doesn't stop the dream however. William starts teaching music to locals and passes on his passion to his sons, the dutiful Bill and the fiery and more talented Jim. Bill is soon working steadily as a sideman in swing bands (good enough to get called up to the big time and join Duke Ellington) while Jim is drawn to bebop. He doesn't want people to dance to his music, he wants them to sit and listen. And when they don't (at first) it drives him to despair. Toss in a beautiful Hollywood movie star who can swing a tune like Anita O'Day for a love triangle and the racial prejudice of LA cops in that era for some simmering violence and you've got yourself a show.

This updated version directed and choreographed again by Christopher Windom is more focused and successful. They've tossed out an unnecessary framing device and made clearer the romance between the movie star Jane and Bill, making her affair with Jim all the more painful. I wish Rebecca LaChance had been given more motivation for that betrayal that she and Jim indulge in. But overall, her character and



Treatment



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performance are stronger, with LaChance nailing the tricky changes on her swinging jazz number in act one with more confidence this time around. (She was always aces with her act two number "Unnatural Attraction.") Albert Christmas and Stacey Sargeant are world weary but unbowed as the parents while Juson Williams is having a blast and serves as the master of ceremony as the exuberant Thaddeus Clemons III, the owner of LA's coolest jazz club.

The two brothers are very charismatic as portrayed by Joshua Boone as Bill and Rod Lawrence as Jim. It's clearer now in this production that Bill has talent and confidence of his own, even though jim is the genius. That makes their brotherly back and forth more effective. Lawrence is also subtler with the descent into addiction. These are two very tricky, rewarding parts with the actors called on to belt out some numbers and swing through pages of dialogue at other points in some very ambitious tunes by Kevin Ray. (The book is by Ray & Andrea Lepcio, with additional story by Suellen Vance. Lepcio's contributions have sharpened things up nicely.) Both actors are stronger in the dramatic scenes than some of the exceptionally difficult tunes they have to navigate, but both also shine at certain points.

*Central Avenue Breakdown* still feels a little too schematic in its good brother/brother gone astray tale with heroin addiction and an upbeat finale colliding rather abruptly at the end. But with the strong cast, swinging band and some terrific tunes, it convincingly gives a glimpse into the jazz world of LA back in the day. The work they've put into it has paid off with a more satisfying evening of theater. It may not be ready to jump to Broadway, but at times it does jump and jive and that's an accomplishment indeed.

**THE THEATER SEASON 2012-2013** (on a four star scale)

*As You Like it* (Shakespeare In The Park w Lily Rabe) \*\*\*\*

*Chimichangas And Zolof* \*

*Closer Than Ever* \*\*\*

*Cock* \*\* 1/2

*Harvey* with Jim Parsons \*

*My Children! My Africa!* \*\*\*\*

*Once On This Island* \*\*\*

*Potted Potter* \*

*Storefront Church* \*\* 1/2

*Title And Deed* \*\*\*

*Picture Incomplete* (NYMF) \*\*

*Flambe Dreams* (NYMF) \*\*

*Rio* (NYMF) \*\*

*The Two Month Rule* (NYMF) \*

*Trouble* (NYMF) \*\* 1/2

*Stealing Time* (NYMF) \*\*

*Requiem For A Lost Girl* (NYMF) \*\* 1/2

*Re-Animator The Musical* (NYMF) \*\*\*

*Baby Case* (NYMF) \*\* 1/2

*How Deep Is The Ocean* (NYMF) \*\* 1/2

*Central Avenue Breakdown* (NYMF) \*\*\*

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of *Showbiz Sandbox*, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's [available](#) for free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his [website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called Popsurfing and also [available](#) for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and [gain](#) access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

**Note:** Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review.

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