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Michael Giltz

Posted September 30, 2008 | 04:41 PM (EST)

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# DVDs -- Even George Clooney's Flops Are Cool



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George Clooney is such a savvy, old school Hollywood star that even the movies he makes that don't quite work just seem to add to his stature. *The Good German* was a fascinating exercise in classic Hollywood movie-making. *Burn After Reading* and *Intolerable Cruelty* might not be consistent, but they do let Clooney goof around with aplomb, so no one thinks he takes himself too seriously. Heck, even *Batman & Robin* let Clooney mock himself with charm. His most recent directorial effort is no different: *Leatherheads* (\$29.98; Universal) barely opened

at the box office (grossing \$12 million its opening weekend and dropping fifty percent on the next). People might have questioned his drawing power. Instead, the movie shows Clooney rescuing a script that had bounced around Hollywood for years, making a period romantic comedy, telling about the early days of football and namechecking Preston Sturges. Of course, Man -- even a man like Clooney -- can't live on noble failures alone. Among these interesting flops are some terrific movies: *Michael Clayton*, *Good Night and Good Luck*, *O Brother Where Art Thou*, *Ocean's Eleven* (though not *Twelve* or *Thirteen*), *Syriana*, *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, *Out Of Sight*, *The Thin Red Line* and *Three Kings*. On top of it all, he even weighs in on politics just like Humphrey Bogart did -- like a man who knows what's important and won't be quieted just because he's famous. There may be bigger stars (Will Smith is pretty unbeatable at the box office). But there's no better one right now. Even when he stumbles.

**An Offer I Should Have Refused...Seven Years Ago** -- *The Godfather: The Coppola Restoration* (\$69.99; Paramount) is as essential a DVD release as they come. (The Blu-Ray is reportedly even better, but I didn't receive that one.) You know how brilliant the first two are and no one ever has to watch *The Godfather Part III* (and if you haven't -- don't). Just comparing the first scene is exciting. On my previous DVD, the undertaker looms out of the murky shadows. In the new one, every detail is clear and precise -- his clothing, the furniture in the background, everything is beautifully lit. It's not an inky blackness; the scene and the movie are more subtle than that. And the real revelation is the sound -- on the older DVD, Brando sounds raspy and

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unclear; on the new one, his every grunt is precise and nuanced. So why am I angry? Because in 2001, they released *The Godfather Collection* with tremendous fanfare. Francis Ford Coppola was all over that boxed set with loads of extras. It was presented as definitive but in fact when you compare it to the new release, it was simply unacceptable. (Indeed, when it was released there were many complaints about the picture quality and especially the poor sound.) I understand that the ability to remaster grows by leaps and bounds all the time, but if a DVD was inferior, Coppola shouldn't have lent his name to it and done all those extras. I didn't have anything to compare those old DVDs to, but looking at them now, I'm shocked he would be associated with it. Coppola should have insisted they do a better job or wait until it could be done right before taking part. Is something better than nothing? Not when it comes to one of the all time greats. If you own that old boxed set, you might as well give it away. You need to buy it again.

**The Controversial Smothers Brothers?** -- It's hard to picture now, but when the Smothers Brothers were on TV, those clean cut lads who complained about mom liking the other one better were radicals. *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour -- The Best Of Season 3* (\$49.98; Time Life) captures the third and final season when Tommy and Dick wrassled with network censors, spoke out about Vietnam and when skits were censored simply told viewers to change the channel and check out what was happening on *Bonanaza*. (That alone makes them pretty darn remarkable.) If only their material had dated as well as their politics. Most of the "dangerous" material is modestly in your face by today's standards, though putting it in context helps a little. The best segments by far are the top-notch musical guests like The Doors, Ike and Tina Turner, Joan Baez and more. Tommy kept his name off the writing staff so they'd have a better chance at winning an Emmy (which they did) and that gesture was repaid this year when he received an honorary one. And the DVD extras, such as hundreds of letters and telegrams between the network and the brothers as well as Tommy's commentary, prove the behind the scenes fights were more riveting than what made it onto the air.

**The Iron Man Of Actors** -- He's only 43 but Robert Downey Jr. has already had more than 25 years of ups and downs in the industry where one thing remained constant: his talent. *Iron Man* (\$39.9; Paramount) works almost solely because of his wit and charm as businessman Tony Stark. (And like so many super hero movies, the scenes away from the suit are far more interesting than the ones in it.) Riding the wave of that success, they've reissued *The Singing Detective* (\$14.95; Legend Films), one of his quirkier films, and *Chaplin* (\$19.98; Lionsgate -- out October 14), in which Downey is just brilliant but director Richard Attenborough proves he hasn't a clue about how to direct a movie.

**Too Much "Sex?"** -- I'm sorry, but no romantic comedy should be two hours and 27 minutes long. As if that weren't bad enough, this DVD release of *Sex and the City Extended Cut* (\$34.98; New Line) is padded out even more to two hours and 31 minutes. Quick, Carrie! Get an editor.

**Horatio Hornblower Collector's Edition** (\$59.95; A&E) -- This top notch series of TV movies is by far the best adaptation of the classic seafaring novels by CS Forester about the upright, self-lacerating Horatio, embodied to perfection by Ioan Gruffud and an excellent cast. You get all eight adventures in one tight, economical package. Hopefully, there will be more to come: the books follow Hornblower through his entire career to old age and I pray that they're just waiting for Gruffud to get older before tackling more of the tales. Ideally, this could be a 40 year project with the actor aging in real time. In any case, the stories they've already told are great fun.

**Top Notch Movies** -- FW Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (\$29.95; Kino) is a devastating silent classic about an old doorman who loses his job and his dignity. Now why aren't I angry about this upgrade in quality from the 2001 release the way I am about *The Godfather*? Because this film was released in 1924, as opposed to being a recent blockbuster and because Murnau wasn't around to give it the thumbs up the way Coppola did the shoddy earlier edition. Also out is Ozu's final film *An Autumn Afternoon* (\$29.95; Criterion); *Aki Kaurismaki's Proletariat Trilogy* (\$44.95; Eclipse), a fun collection of three deadpan gems; and *Beaufort* (\$29.95; Kino), an Academy Award foreign film nominee about Israel trying to extricate itself from Lebanon after 18 years.

**Documentaries** -- *The Rape Of Europa* (\$29.95; Menemsha) is a fine documentary whose fairly interesting if unremarkable story (the Nazis looted art museums; we got the artwork mostly back) should play much better on TV than in the movies -- it's like a superior episode of *Nova*; *Unforgotten: 25 Years After Willowbrook* (\$24.98; City Lights) is a follow-up to Geraldo Rivera's worthy claim to fame -- an expose of horrid conditions at a state-run school for people with

"Washington Unplugged"

Arianna was on CBS' "Washington..."

**Alex Leo** The "Real Housewives Of New York City" Flowchart Of Hate

I'm a little embarrassed to love this show as much as...

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STRASBOURG, France — On the eve of the NATO...

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**Obama Teases Reporter From India During Press Conference** (VIDEO)

Obama held a conference packed with press from around the world on Thursday. He called...

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On Thursday's episode of "Mad Money" host Jim Cramer declared that the depression...

**Scientists Find Rocket Fuel Chemical In Infant Formula**

ATLANTA — Traces of a chemical used in rocket fuel were found in samples of...

**Least Wasteful Cities In America** (SLIDESHOW)

It's great to love the city you live in, and better to

developmental disabilities (his original report is included as a bonus); *Bigger Stronger Faster* (\$26.98; Magnolia) is a documentary about steroids that wonders if it's still cheating when seemingly everyone does it; *The Mindscape of Alan Moore* (\$29.95; Disinformation), which takes a look at the graphic trailblazer on the eve of the long-gestating film version of *Watchmen*; and *Larry Flynt -- The Right To Be Left Alone* (\$19.97; Anchor Bay) focuses heavily on the sleaze merchant's necessary First Amendment battles.

**TV on DVD** -- I have an unreasonable dislike of actor Ron Perlman -- he's been in good movies and has quirky good taste and a lot of directors clearly like him. But even fans might have been surprised when he turned into a swooning romantic lead thanks to *Beauty and the Beast -- The Complete Series* (\$89.98; Paramount), a truly unusual romantic fantasy unlike anything else in primetime before or since. Loads of extras, including a run-down of the Beast's romantic letters to Linda Hamilton. Also out: the surprisingly successful *This American Life Season One* (\$19.99; Showtime), which transferred the Ira Glass radio show to TV; the even more unlikely (and far less successful) *Click & Clack's As The Wrench Turns* (\$29.98; PBS) which bizarrely turned NPR's "Car Talk" radio show into an animated series; a typically star-studded British miniseries about royalty, *Edward The King* (\$59.99; Acorn), including John Gielgud and Charles Dance; *Samantha Who First Season* (\$29.99; ABC), which like so many sitcoms these days has a cast -- Christina Applegate and especially Jean Smart -- far superior to the material; the late, unlamented soap *Cashmere Mafia -- The Complete Series* (\$29.95; Sony); the under-appreciated crime drama *Numb3rs Fourth Season* (\$59.98; Paramount), which benefits greatly from Judd Hirsch, Rob Morrow and David Krumholtz, who add up to a lot more together than they would on their own -- and even make a convincing family; *Inside The Actors Studio: Robin Williams* (\$14.99; Shout) is reportedly the most requested episode of all, which just goes to show how much good will those reruns of *Mork & Mindy* can get you -- includes 40 minutes of extra footage; *Rob & Big 3rd Season* (\$39.98; MTV) is a harmless odd couple type sitcom that proves how little MTV has to do with music anymore; *Gangland Complete Season One* (\$39.95; History) is a run-down of all the gangs and how they rose to power, a good primer for those who want to know the difference between the Crips and the Bloods and the Almighty Black P Stone (no, I hadn't heard of them either); Lynda La Plante, the creator of *Prime Suspect*, proves how crucial Helen Mirren was to that show with *Trial and Retribution Set 1* (\$59.99; Acorn), a standard policer that has none of her classic work's distinctiveness; *Friday The 13th The Series 1st Season* (\$54.99; Paramount) comes to DVD and what's really scary is that I never even knew it had been a series; *Ken Russell at the BBC* (\$59.98; BBC Video), shows the flamboyant director delivering six ground-breaking arts documentaries in the 1960s; *Brothers & Sisters Second Season* (\$59.99; ABC) is the steadily improving soaper giving Sally Fields her best work in years. And finally no one -- I mean NO ONE -- has ever said, "Gee, I'd love to buy HALF a season of my favorite TV show," so why do they keep putting out sets like *My Three Sons The First Season Volume One* (\$39.98; Paramount). As if that's not bad enough, these are "edited" versions from the original broadcast episodes (maybe they're the shorter syndicated editions) and they didn't get the music rights to all the original cues. So that's going to be \$80 for one full season of a 48 year old sitcom in truncated form without the original music. To get all 12 seasons would apparently cost \$960. Nearly \$1000 for *My Three Sons*? Have they lost their minds?

**Odds & Ends** -- The umpteenth repackaging of *Grease: Rockin' Rydell Edition* (\$19.99; Paramount); *New York Yankees: The Essential Games Of Yankee Stadium* (\$59.95; A&E) has six complete games from the 70s and on, plus extras, which might take a little sting out of the closing of the venue, not to mention a season that has ended in (gulp) September; *Jewel: The Essential Live Songbook* (\$29.99; Koch), a performer still overshadowed by her massive debut album who is captured here in two concerts, one of which includes a chamber orchestra; *School House Rock Election Collection* (\$19.99; Disney) includes 15 videos, highlighted by the all-time classic "I'm Just A Bill;" *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (\$34.98; Universal), is a so-so comedy that had a great ad campaign and is well-presented on DVD since this edition includes the theatrical version, an unrated version most people will only want to watch once and a digital copy for watching on your computer and portable devices; *CSNY/Deja Vu* (\$14.98; Lionsgate) is an OK look at the gang touring with their in-your-face political songs condemning Bush that didn't always get a rousing welcome from people just there to hear "Our House" -- the highlight is definitely Neil Young having a local TV reporter reference the song "'Let's Impeach The President" and then ask, "What's that song about?"; *Travel With Kids London* and *Travel With Kids England* (\$14.98 each; Porchlight) are just under one hour visits to the top sites with some tips for parents traveling with children, though I can't decide whether they're better as previews to show kids what they'll see or as



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souvenirs afterwards for kids to remember what they did.

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Leatherheads was quite funny, has a sparkling script and is a textbook on comic timing. Not sure why it did not fare better in the theaters, it deserved to be. Might have been scheduling. anyway, he's honing his chops as a comedy director, and those are far and few between.

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I'm sure it will find fans on DVD who will agree with you and ultimately prove profitable. With three movies, I certainly think Clooney will eventually be -- like Eastwood -- a director of note.

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**3fingerbrown** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of 3fingerbrown](#) [permalink](#)

Love these DVD roundups.

My two cents' worth:

Yeah, "Godfather III" is a letdown, to say the least, but not without its charms. I like the scenes with Pacino and Andy Garcia; Joe Montegna is a such a perfect fit for the "Godfather" franchise that you

wish there was a better "Godfather" movie to put him in; and Connie's emergence as a scheming mafia dragon lady is a clever turn, and well played by Talia Shire.

"The Last Laugh" is a beautiful film, with a memorable performance by Emil Jannings, a world-class actor ruined by his Nazi affiliations.

Downey had many fine moments as Chaplin, and you have to admire that he managed to capture the great man's grace and dexterity while carrying a major coke monkey on his back, but like Dustin Hoffman as Lenny Bruce, or Rod Steiger as W.C. Fields, or Streisand as Fanny Brice, when it came to re-creating the comedy routines he was curiously unfunny. Not sure I've ever seen a film actor playing a famous comedian who was able to convey the unique funniness that made the comedian famous in the first place.

If you really must spring for "My Three Sons," stick with the early seasons, the William Frawley/early Bill Demerest period. Bail at the first sight of Beverly Garland and that snot-nosed kid.

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Thanks for reading; send your friends to here! The Godfather III isn't completely worthless but compared to the first two? I'd rather I had never seen it at all and kept those two pristine. Whatever minor charms can be eked out of it, wouldn't you tell people to not bother? There's no point in watching Star Wars: The Phantom Menace either. No real good can come of it. You're right; it's VERY hard to be funny when recreating classic comedy sketches by masters Another good/bad example was the Peter Sellers HBO movie.

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rini See Profile I'm a Fan of rini permalink

Robert Downey Jr.

I always find his quick mind and quicker mouth to be extremely entertaining. I loved Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, despite the fact that it got mixed reviews. The "chemistry" between RD Jr and Val Kilmer was great.

"You're an idiot. You know that. You know if you looked in the dictionary next to the word "idiot" you know what you'll find? ...

A picture of me?

No! The definition of the word "idiot". Which you are.

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"Jack." Lord, I've tried to block that out. I have no problem with putting out a DVD of the movies. But why not save the massively expensive deluxe edition until you can do it right? And I know real fans of TV shows end up buying every season and then buying the complete boxed set all over again to get a few new extras. But that's a bummer and most people feel a little ripped off.

Now when is "Fish" gonna come out on DVD?

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Nunziato See Profile I'm a Fan of Nunziato permalink

Yes, something is better than nothing when The Godfather is involved. The greatest American film? Absolutely. If Paramount released a "Super-Duper Special Edition" next week that included an extended interview with Abe Vigoda, I would have to buy it. (Ok maybe not) But, I can't imagine what any fans of this movie would have done if we had still been waiting for a definitive DVD release in 2008, when we are up to Season Three of "Family Affair." Coppola gets a pass on this one, but he still has "Jack" to answer for.

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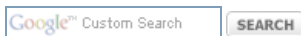
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