

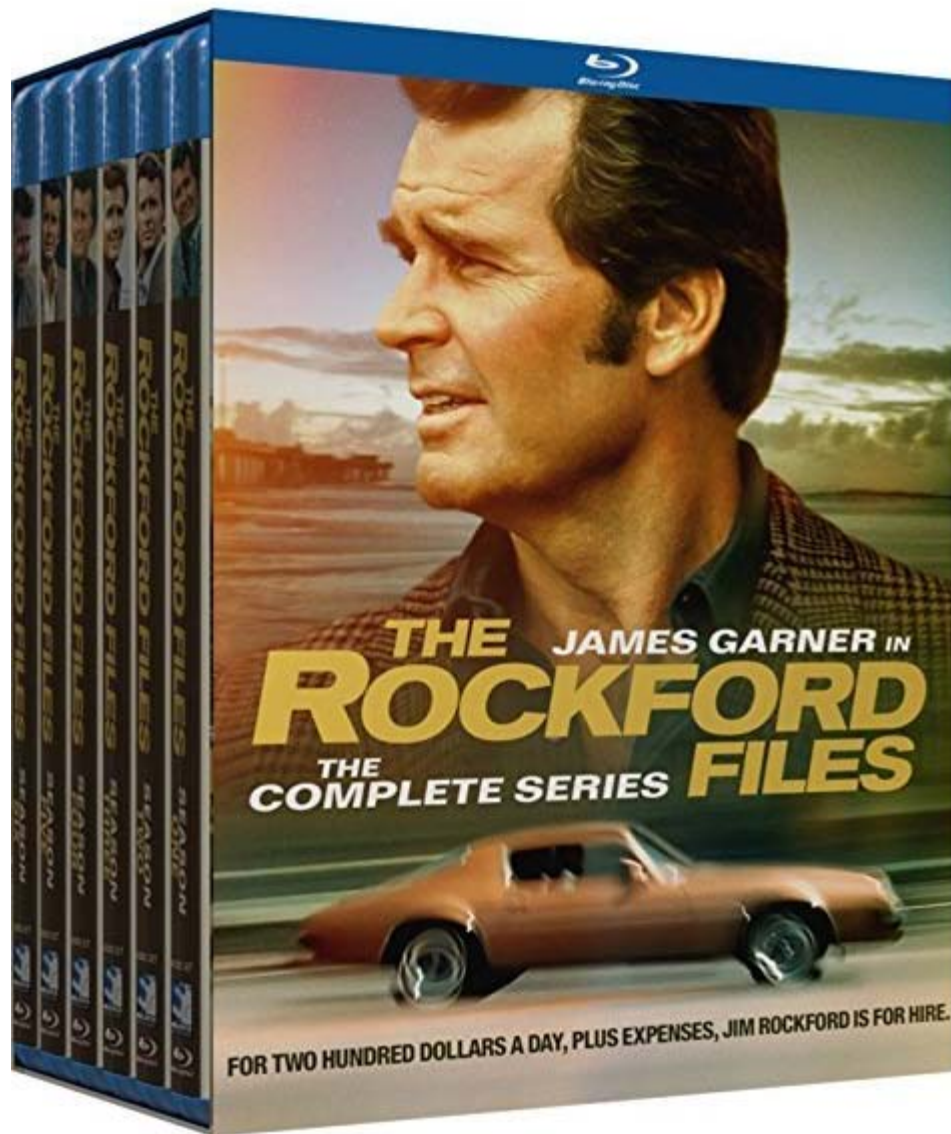


**Michael Giltz, Contributor** BookFilter creator

## DVDs Get Criminal: "The Rockford Files" Gets its Due, "Homicide" Too, And "Prime Suspect" Gets Younger

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TV is where the action is on BluRay and DVD these days. With 500+ scripted shows and an ever-growing backlist of classic tv, even finding a tv show online can be a pain in the neck. So for the ones you love, the shows you want to rewatch or at least proudly display and say, "Heck yeah, I enjoy *Buffy!*" well a boxed set is the way to go. In among some classic movies and new releases, you'll find a lot of TV, including James Garner's great role as a private eye who got the heck beat out of him, never got the girl (or even paid very often) but still remained a hero.

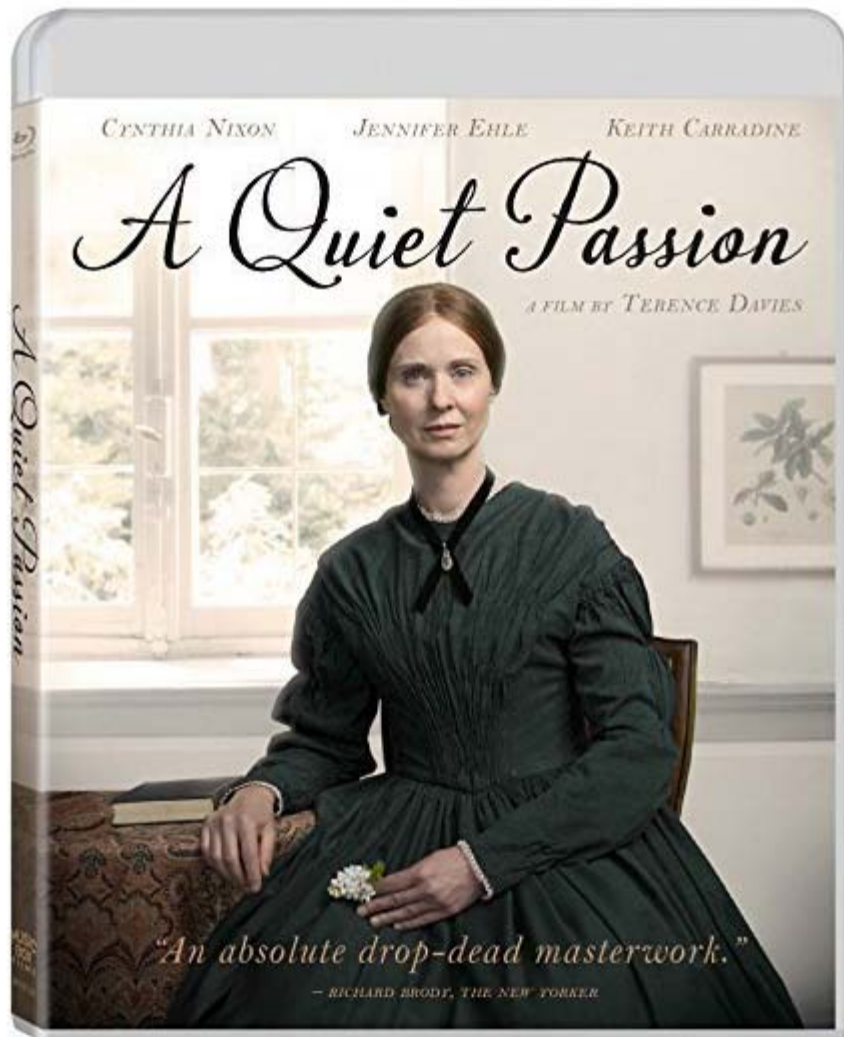


**THE ROCKFORD FILES COMPLETE SERIES** (\$129.99 BluRay; Mill Creek Entertainment)

James Garner is one of those rare actors to have two classic TV shows to his credit. The first is the comic western *Maverick*, a show where our hero was a card sharp that didn't carry a gun and preferred to talk his way out of trouble (not always successfully). In many ways it was an anti-Western. One of the people behind that show decided he wanted to update *Maverick* to contemporary times and who better than James Garner? So came *The Rockford Files*, the show about a down on his luck private eye who had done time (it was a wrongful conviction), rarely carried a gun and preferred to fast-talk his way out of trouble. Garner left *Maverick* when the studio tried to screw him out of his fair share of profits. And it happened again on *The Rockford Files*, but thankfully not before they booked six successful seasons. Once Garner got his pay day (despite the studio

insisting they lost money on the hit show, they finally caved), he returned for eight more TV movies (not included here). Everything about this show is a treat, from the answering machine message that starts every episode to the eccentric supporting cast to Garner's woebegone look on his face when it's pretty clear he's going to get the tara beaten out of him (again). In many ways, Rockford harkens back to the noble private eye of noir, a guy who rarely gets the girl or the glory but is a real white knight that does good and expects no reward. The writing is top notch and the talent involved later worked on *The Sopranos*, *Tenspeed and Brown Shoes*, *The Greatest American Hero* and many others. It's a slow starter but they really find their rhythm by the end of season one. It's not TV drama at the level of contemporaries like *Upstairs Downstairs* or the soon to explode masterpiece *Hill Street Blues*. But it's very satisfying, very well acted and has a pessimistic tone all its own. And no one had innate appeal quite like Garner, who should have had a bigger film career as well. Here you get all six seasons, complete and unedited. (These aren't the truncated, syndicated episodes.) No extras at all, but the episodes look solid here; the packaging is unglamorous and discs are stacked two at a time on spindles so it's not ideal. But when you get a whole series (122 episodes) at a modest price, you get what you get and the picture and sound quality is what matters most.





**THEIR FINEST** (\$24.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

**A QUIET PASSION** (\$34.95 BluRay; Music Box Films)

Two excellent leads anchor these rather different films. The first makes an excellent companion piece for anyone thinking of seeing Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*. The British romantic comedy *Their Finest* is set in the homefront during WW II where our heroine (Gemma Arterton) gets a lucky break: she's been picked to write the female dialogue for a war picture about Dunkirk, a patriotic effort meant to inspire patriotism. The film is a treat as it captures the spirit of people during war in the charmingly clear-eyed vein of *Hope & Glory*. War is hell, yes, but away from the front, if we're totally honest, it can be kind of a lark — people have a purpose like none they'd ever experience and women realized opportunities closed to them for generations. *Their Finest* does quite a few things, gently satirizing the war movies of the era, showing a young woman coming into her

own and delivering a fine romance. Bill Nighy has a terrific part as an aging actor. I do wish the movie had been slightly less faithful to the novel, since a climactic choice was a little too pat. Oh well. And if you like it, do read the delightful novel by Lissa Evans it is based on.

*A Quiet Passion* has first and foremost the excellent turn by Cynthia Nixon as poet Emily Dickinson. It's also the latest film by director Terence Davies, one of our most distinctive talents. It's beautiful and restrained and intelligent and pretty much everyone ignored it when it came out. Subtlety, thy name is box office poison. Perhaps English teachers will force high school students to watch this in the hopeless desire to make them care for Dickinson's sneakily (or should that be snakily?) intelligent verse. (Hey, they could fit into Twitter's 140 character limit with ease!) Mostly it suffers from not being undeniably great. It's good but a film like this needs to be absolutely brilliant to break through these days. Don't make the mistake of ignoring it.





# BOB HOPE



*Marilyn* MAXWELL

*Lloyd* NOLAN

*Jane* DARWELL

THE  
**LEMON DROP KID**





**THE ROAD TO RIO** (\$24.95 BluRay Kino Lorber Studio Classics)

**THE LEMON DROP KID** (\$24.95 BluRay Kino Lorber Studio Classics)

**SON OF PALEFACE** (\$24.95 BluRay Kino Lorber Studio Classics)

I just don't like Bob Hope, not since seeing him at Gator Growl in Gainesville Florida in one of the most misbegotten ventures of his entire TV career. But he's a hugely influential comic (if not actually a terribly funny one), pioneering the topical monologue that dominates late night tv to this day, not to mention the kids in the hall who would write jokes for Hope, Carson and so many other front men. Yet for all that, I have to admit Hope's girl hungry, cowardly persona appeals somehow. And yeah, he made some very good movies. The *Road* movies with Bing Crosby are at the top of the list and here we've got *Road To Rio*, along with two of his

cleverest solo ventures, the race track comedy *The Lemon Drop Kid* and the western spoof *Son of Paleface*. Sure he'd become embalmed almost in front of our eyes on national TV with special after annual special. But anyone who can inspire the best of the early Woody Allen can't be all bad. Here's proof.







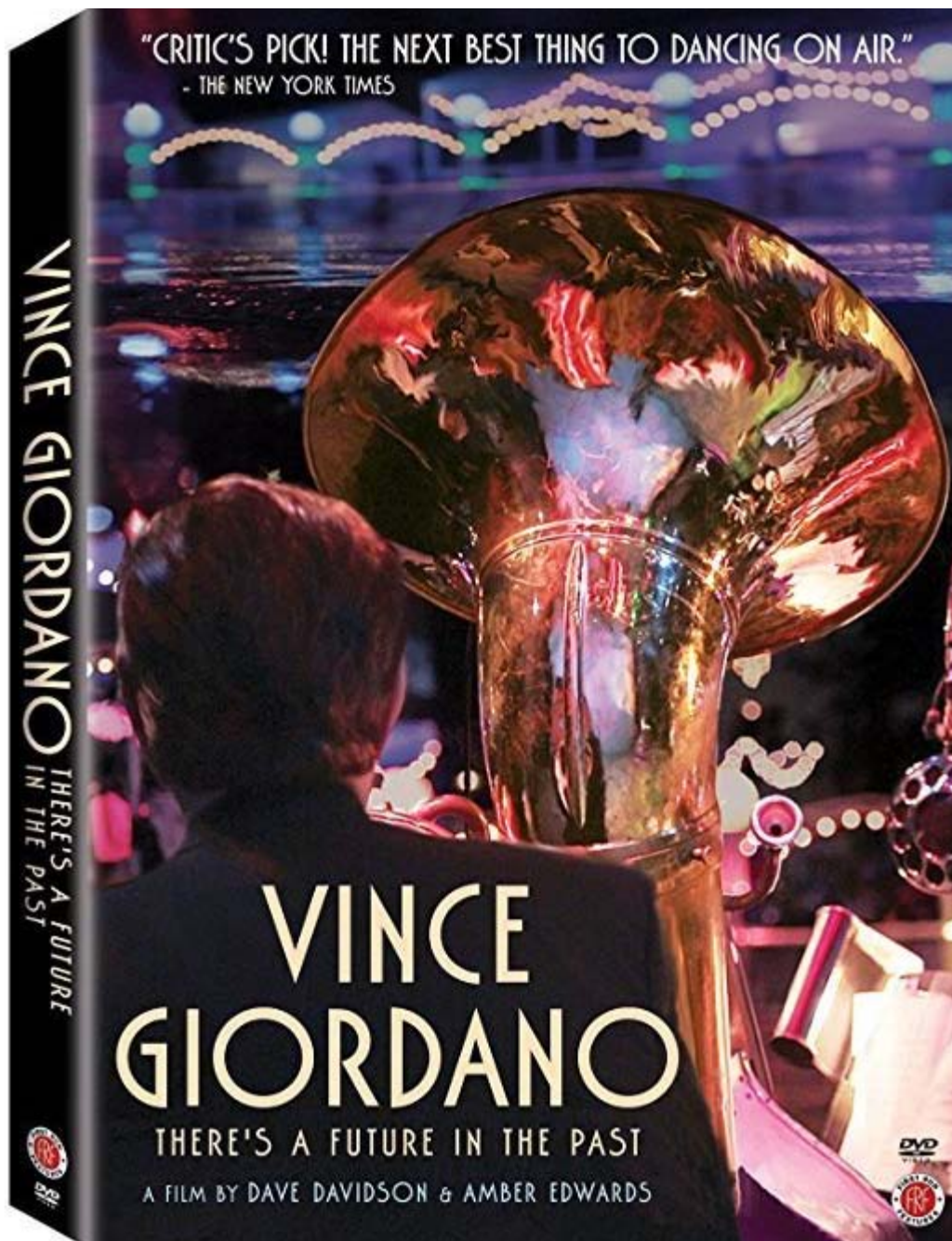
**THE FATE OF THE FURIOUS** (\$34.98 BluRay; Universal Studios Home Entertainment)

**KONG: SKULL ISLAND** (\$35.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

You want to know the best recent Bond film? It might just be the action extravaganza *The Fate Of The Furious*, whose multi-cultural cast reflects the world we live in and whose endless crazy stunts are the you-gotta-see-this hooks that used to lure us into Bond film after Bond film in the 1970s and 1980s. Vin Diesel is the anchor but the all-star cast is filled with fun actors having a blast larking around in all this nonsense. They would be crazy to spin off some of the characters so those actors bring much needed blood to this franchise. Never catches its breath thank goodness or you might realize how ridiculous the whole thing really is. But fun

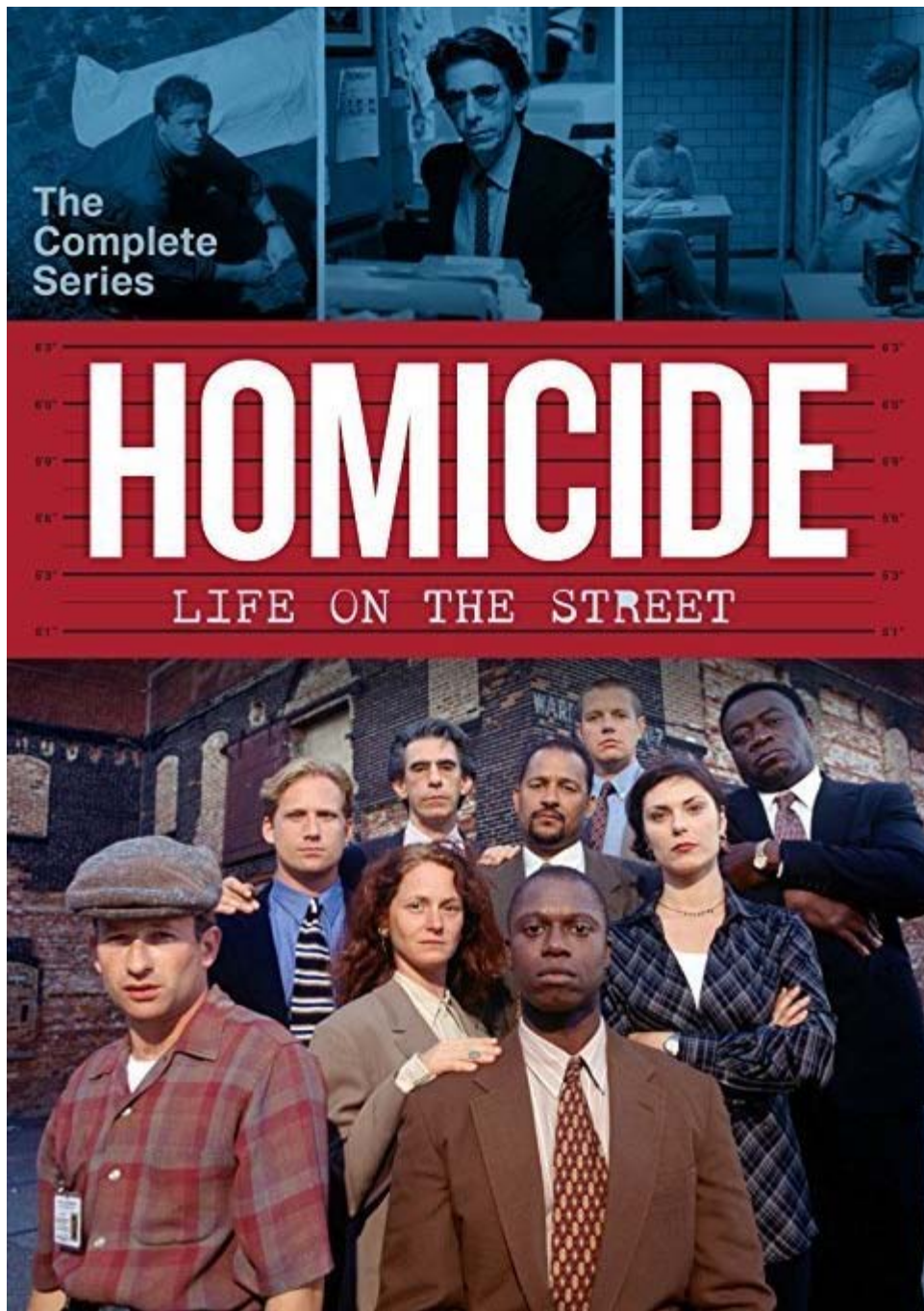
anyway.

*Kong: Skull Island* hoped to launch a franchise and a little thing like so-so reviews isn't going to stop them. The movie was a hit, niftily tripling its big \$185 million budget with a \$560 million take worldwide. The setting was smart, placing this Kong in the early 1970s and giving it a Vietnam kick. A secret mission lands some mercenary vets onto Skull Island where they soon realize their only mission is to get the hell off of it as soon as possible. Samuel L. Jackson is the vet who'll be damned if he's gonna get pushed around anymore after losing Saigon, so the big ape will taste his lead. John C. Reilly is very unfortunate comic relief as a guy who has been stranded with the locals for years. But the real misfire is Tom Hiddleston, an excellent actor who in no way shape or form convinces as an action hero. You don't buy him for a second as a soldier of fortune and it doesn't help that he's burdened with dialogue that leadenly hammers home the point that Kong is defending the island and just wants to be left alone. Casting sunk this one, but it's still not that bad if Kong is what you want. I'd rather watch this than Peter Jackson's dull *King Kong* remake any day but that still doesn't mean it's good.



**VINCE GIORDANO: THERE'S A FUTURE IN THE PAST** (\$24.95 DVD First Run Features)

I'm no avid collector like R. Crumb but jazz and pop music of the 1920s and 1930s strikes a delicious nerve for me because it's so modern in its sensibility and yet so clearly from days gone by. Hence I know exactly who Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks are: a great band that plays this music with verve and passion beyond the curatorial. This documentary tells their story and like many documentaries, it may not be remarkable as a film but they have a passionate story to tell and they tell it pretty well. Plus, there's all that music!



**HOMICIDE: LIFE ON THE STREETS** (\$149.99 DVD: Shout! Factory)

*Homicide* always knew it was Important Television and that may be the thing that keeps me from embracing it to my heart the way I do other classic, acclaimed dramas. But classic and acclaimed it is, with an excellent cast led by Andre Braugher and so many others. It's passionate and sometimes riveting and sure Melissa Leo has WAY too much hair and acts with it way too often (she got a lot better). If you're going to discuss TV dramas, you have to see *Homicide*. It's as simple as that. This boxed set includes the entire run with unedited episodes and some very good extras throughout. Richard Belzer, Yaphet Kotto, Max Perlich, Daniel Baldwin — it's the best work for many of them. Seven seasons, a TV movie and the feeling every step of the way that they were reaching for the brass ring. Always overshadowed by *Hill Street Blues* before it and *NYPD Blue*

alongside it (the show which got all the ratings and glory), *Homicide* endures because of its quality. If you're making a list of classic TV dramas, those are three you have to reckon with and what better place to start then right here?

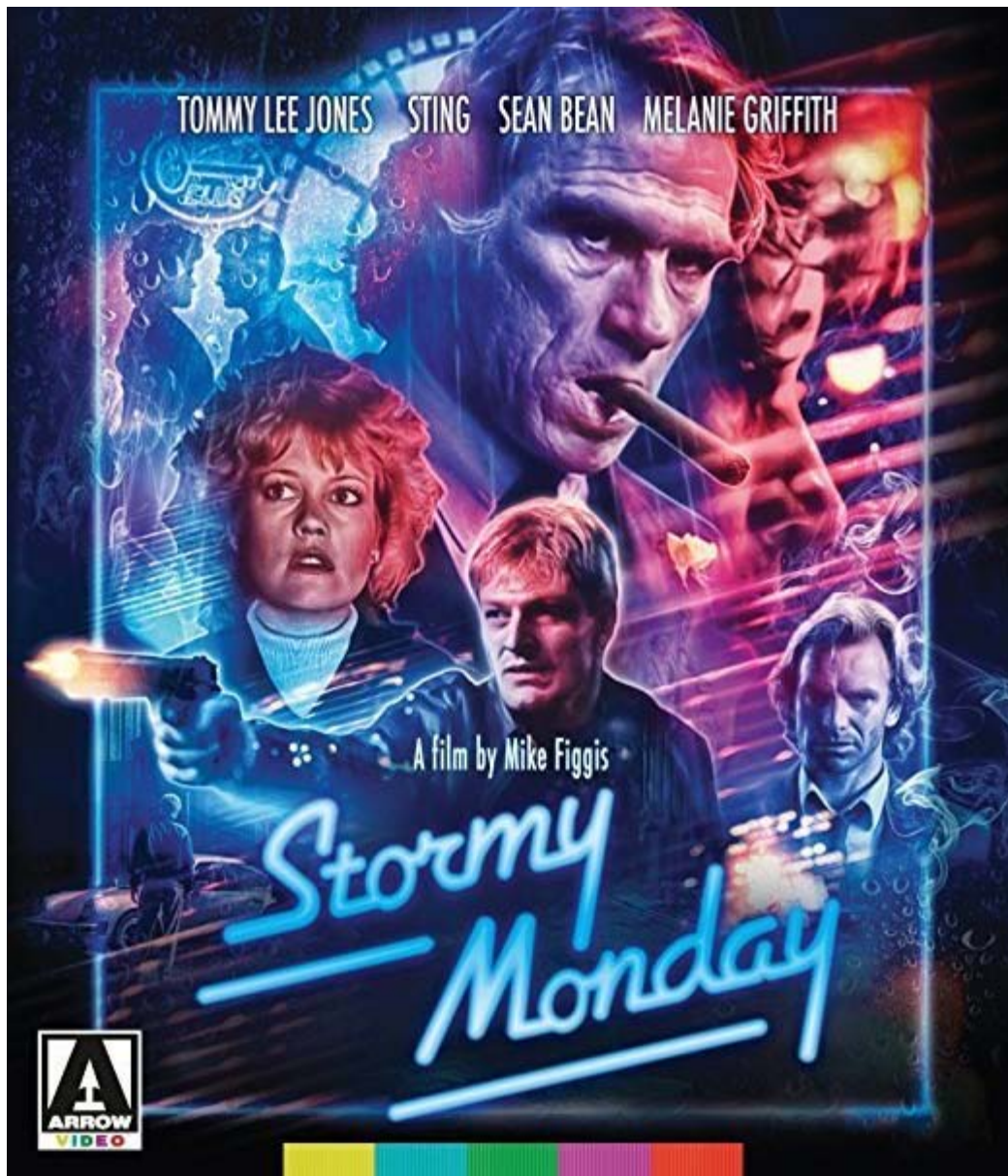




MERYL STREEP KURT RUSSELL CHER

# SILKWOOD

A MIKE NICHOLS FILM



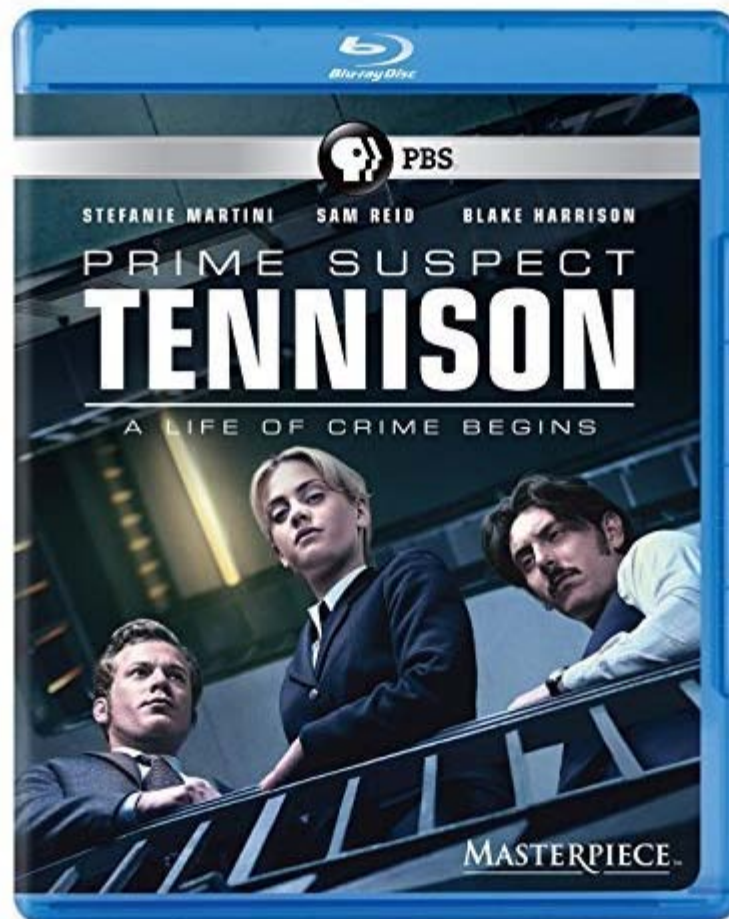
**PRIZZI'S HONOR** (\$24.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber Studio Classics)

**SILKWOOD** (\$24.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber Studio Classics)

**STORMY MONDAY** (\$29.95 BluRay; Arrow Video)

Three movies pretty much unrelated except they're all good to great and all feature terrific supporting turns. John Huston's late career surge was pretty remarkable. The director's last three films were *Under The Volcano*, *Prizzi's Honor* and the brilliant capper *The Dead*. Wow. *Prizzi's Honor* has delicious black humor and great lead turns from Kathleen Turner and Jack Nicholson. But the scene stealer is Huston's daughter Angelica Houston, who is positively magnetic and went on to greatness in movies like *The Grifters*. *Silkwood* isn't nearly as fun. It's a Mike Nichols' expose of the dangers of nuclear power, led by Meryl Streep's typically nuanced work as a real life worker who risked everything to expose what was going on in terms of shoddy practices at her plant. But again the scene stealer is a supporting actress, this time Cher. She's terrific as Streep's lesbian

roommate. From a Robert Altman a year earlier to *Silkwood* in 1983 and *Mask* in 1985, Cher was off and running. No one would be surprised when she won Best Actress for *Moonstruck* in 1987 and rightly so. Finally, there's the moody Mike Figgis crime drama *Stormy Monday*. It's not bad, coasting mostly on atmosphere and good, jazzy score by Figgis himself. Fans will certainly appreciate the bonus-laden presentation of this special edition. Scoring the best as an actor? Musician Sting. He pretty much stopped after this film and a turn in *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* a decade later in 1998. A shame, since his magnetism on stage translated to film quite well. On the other hand, he's a musician first and foremost so where the heck is the jazz album of standards he hinted at here and should have recorded ages ago? His version of "Someone To Watch Over Me" is excellent.

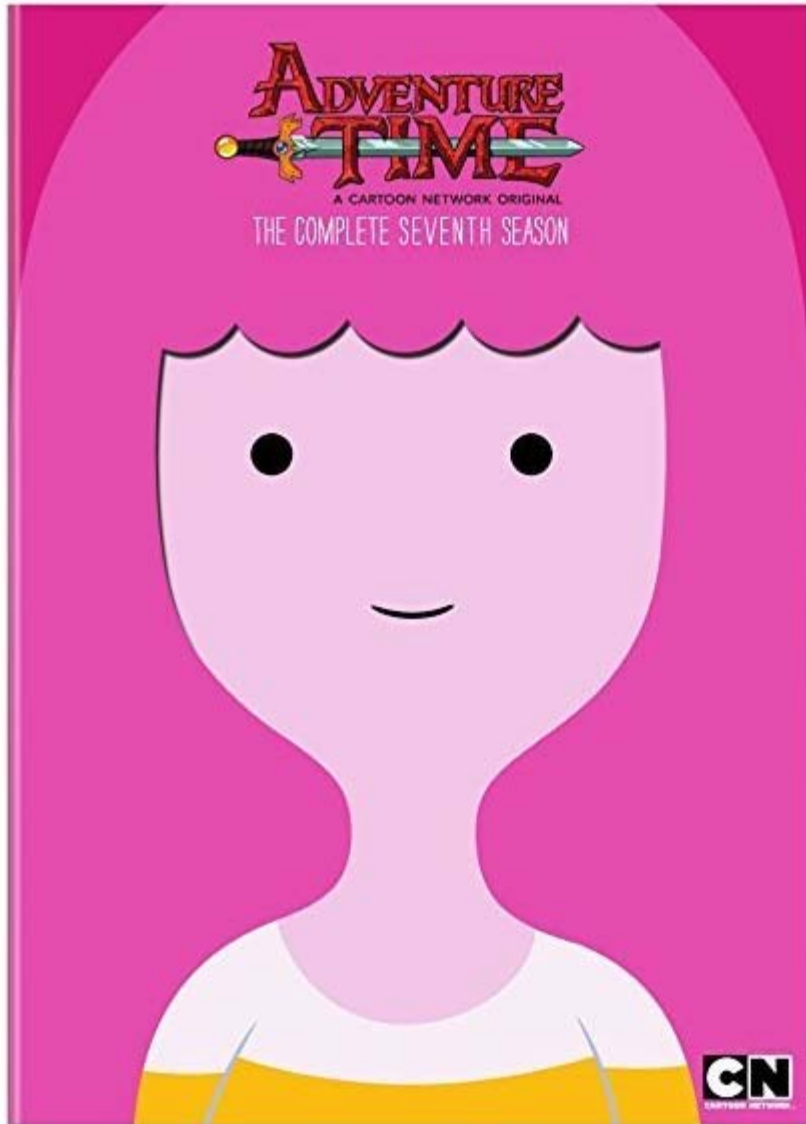


**PRIME SUSPECT: TENNISON** (\$49.99 BluRay; PBS)

*Prime Suspect* and its sequel are two of the greatest miniseries in TV history. They continued to do sequel after sequel because we all demanded it even though in our heart of hearts we know we should have left well enough alone. We wanted more Helen Mirren as Jane Tennison; let her fall apart even more, we said! The series ultimately ended decently and with its head held high but you'd be fine if you just watched the first two



iterations. Now comes the need to beat a dead horse: a prequel. Actually that's the first smart idea in a while since it's the only way to approach Tension from a new angle. Stefanie Martini has the thankless task of playing a less confident Tension just starting out on her career and she's just fine really. Creator Lynda La Plante is back on board too but you won't be surprised to know that it doesn't quite capture lightning in a bottle again like the original. Still, it's quite watchable on its own terms. I look forward to seeing Martini in something else, not to mention Sam Reid in whatever he wants. Just don't hold your breath for season two: it did well enough in the ratings in the UK but La Plante and ITV couldn't come to terms and it's not going forward.





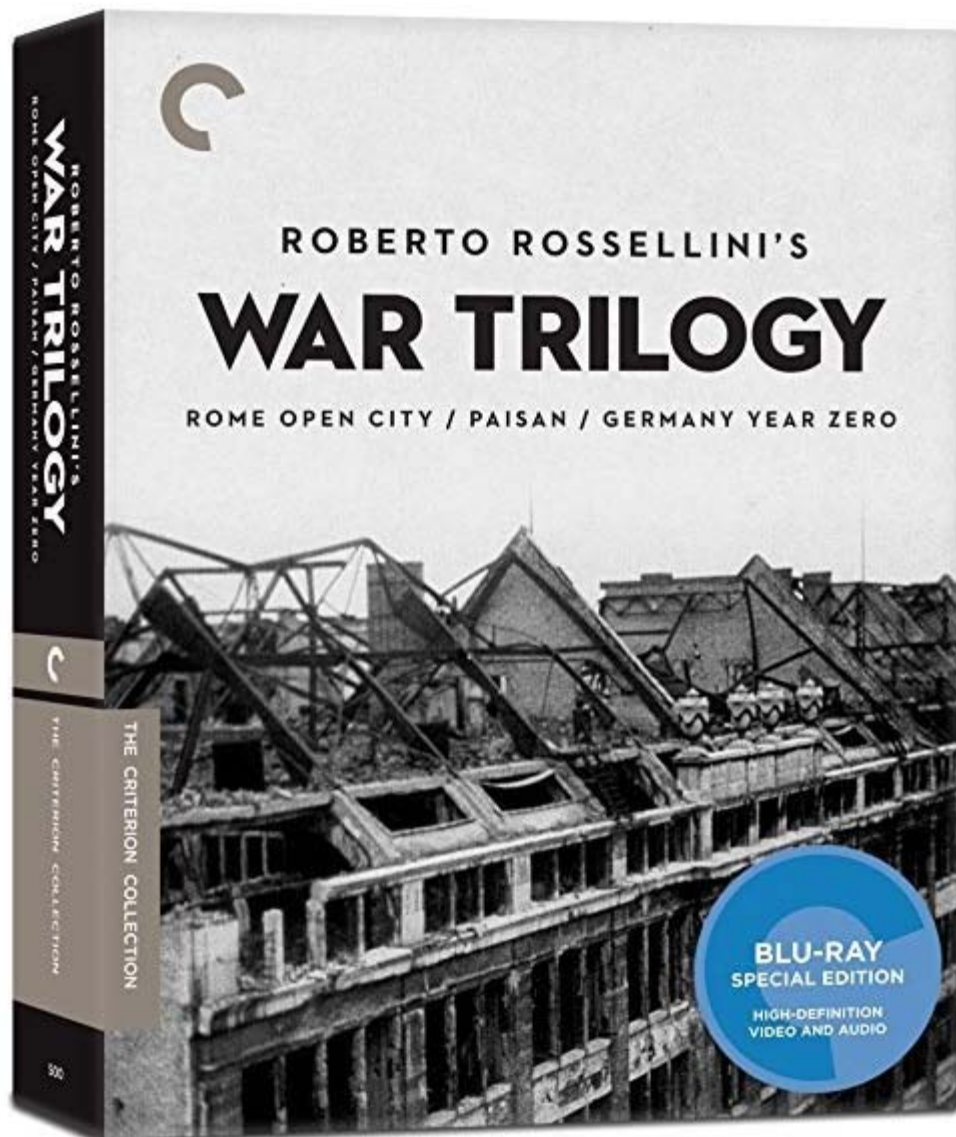
**ADVENTURE TIME COMPLETE SEVENTH SEASON** (\$24.95 DVD; Warner Bros.)

**THE 100 COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON** (\$39.99 BluRay; Warner Archive Collection)

I just mentioned *Prime Suspect*, as good example as any of how hard it is to end a TV show at the right time and in the right way. Mind you, it's getting easier since everyone realizes TV shows live forever and fans will enjoy it more if a show can have a proper ending or at least give the satisfying sense of life going on rather than just...stopping. *Adventure Time* looks set to end well. This Cartoon Network curiosity is an odd duck, a kid's show but with a surreal nature and philosophical underpinnings that have made it fodder for college students who smoke a lot and adults who can glom onto stuff like this and appreciate the thought that has gone into it. And yet it does work for kids on some elemental level, spinning of comic books and the like. It's a quest tale set in the land of Ooo (yes, Ooo) and stars a little boy and his shape-changing dog Jake in a post-apocalyptic world peopled by Princess Bubblegum and the King of Ice and so much more. It's rich and clever and not always great but always interesting. They've announced the current batch of episodes (season nine) will be its last but the writers have known this for ages and planned accordingly. In recent years individual seasons have also included multi-arc episodes constituting a miniseries in the middle of the series. Season Seven ended one week and was followed the next by the launch of season eight. Nonetheless, this is the

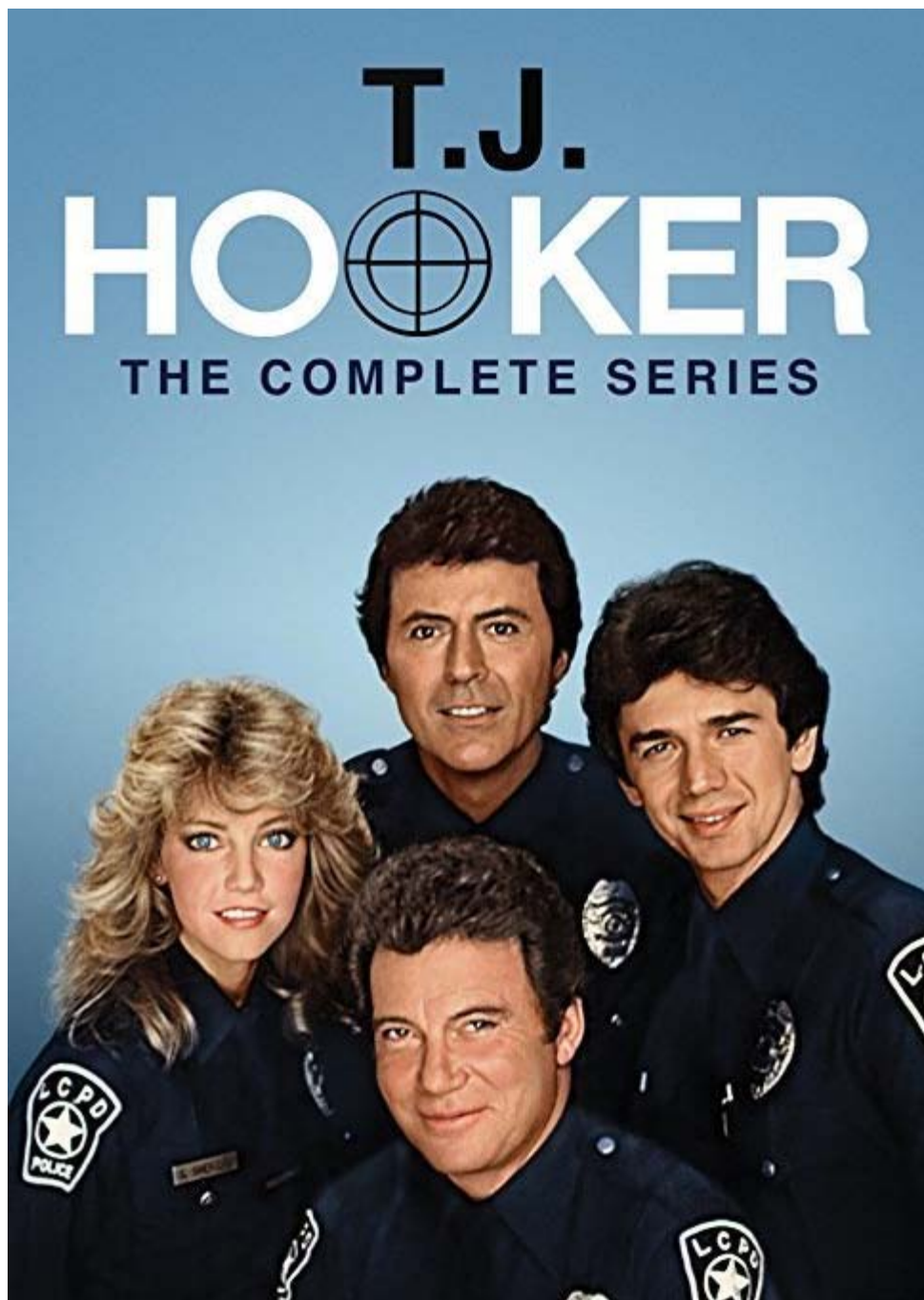
entire season seven, only available on DVD (as so much TV is today in a cost-cutting measure). No they're not randomly labeling this season seven and no it's not really cruel of them to not make it available on BluRay. Just be glad such a weird little show is still around after more than 260 episodes and gets to end on its own terms. I came in the middle of the run and look forward to taking it all in soon.

*The 100* on the other hand seems to be stumbling towards the end. It's another post-apocalyptic world, this one peopled by hot young people put back on earth and wished good luck. Ratings have fallen a bit so the renewal for season five felt like a lucky break. I just wish they'd said it would be the fifth and final season (as seems likely) so the sci-fi series could figure out where they want to take it. This show got dramatically better as it went along. That still just means it's good genre fare; we're not talking *Battlestar Galactica* here, folks. But it's fun and deserves at least a shot at sticking the landing. But what do I know? I was stunned (and delighted) that *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* got renewed so maybe *The 100* will last long enough to make 100 episodes. Only 42 to go!



## **ROBERTO ROSSELLINI'S WAR TRILOGY** (\$99.95 BluRay; Criterion Collection)

Pope Francis loves *Rome, Open City* and declares it one of his favorite films. He's out of touch with Italians who saw this movie right after WW II: they wanted escapism, not the depressing realism director Roberto Rossellini captured in his neo-realist masterpiece. The movie's reputation soared as it proved a worldwide hit and garnered praise pretty much everywhere else. So Rossellini followed it up with *Paisan*, another neo-realist film in which non-actors performed in eight disparate tales about the liberation of Italy. More praise; more box office. So Rossellini headed to the enemy for *Germany, Year Zero*, in which he captured that country's bombed out capitol. Oddly, this time he did it on a soundstage instead of on location and pretty much no one liked it, least of all the Germans. Still, as a trilogy it's enormously influential so Criterion delivers this boxed set with an all-new remastering of picture and sound. The copious and excellent extras come from earlier editions, as one would expect. This set is the very definition of what Criterion does best, presenting the important films of world cinema in excellent shape and with the context to appreciate and learn about why they are so significant. It may track downward in quality and I've never really held it in anything but intellectual respect, but there's no denying it has proven a landmark.



**T.J. HOOKER: THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$79.97 DVD; Shout! Factory)

And then there's *T.J. Hooker*. This week alone we've covered new releases of classic shows like *The Rockford Files* and *Homicide*. No one would call *Hooker* a classic, least of all the great William Shatner, who killed time between *Star Trek* and *Boston Legal* with this harmless nonsense. It's pretty pointless unless you're a hardcore Shatner fan or watched the show when it aired (hey, there weren't so many channels back then) and want to amaze yourself with what you used sit through and think was not that bad. I do the same with *The Love Boat*, which is awful too but at least had the recompense of giving work to actors of a certain age who could pop in as guest stars. And don't fret over that final season that aired on CBS late at night. It's here and unedited. Just don't expect those episodes to be longer; they weren't tv movie length — CBS just stuffed them full of

ads.

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