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## DVDs: Godard's Biggest Mistake

Posted October 23, 2007 | 03:22 PM (EST)

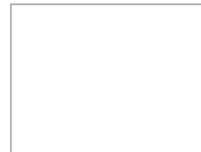
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The biggest mistake of Jean-Luc Godard's career was his 1961 masterpiece *Breathless* (\$39.95; Criterion). Yes, this riff on American gangster flicks starring Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg was formally daring. But it was also sexy, funny, effortlessly entertaining and audiences loved it. Godard would never make that mistake again. He slipped a few times and made films that were somewhat entertaining, if baffling. But by the Seventies he seemed ashamed and apologetic for having made such an accessible, delightful work as *Breathless* and made up for it by turning out one dreary film after another. Happily, that glorious mistake - *Breathless* - lives on despite Godard, and Criterion has delivered its typically marvelous packaging with an impeccable print and loads of extras and essays including an 80 minute making-of documentary.

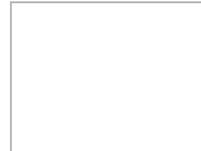
No such doubts ever plagued director Sergei Eisenstein, who delivered masterpieces his entire career. Perhaps his greatest is *Battleship Potemkin* (\$29.95; Kino), available in a lavish newly restored edition that does justice to his triumph. Some silent films are timeless but still of their era, like the works of Charlie Chaplin and D.W. Griffith. But the riveting, thrilling *Battleship*

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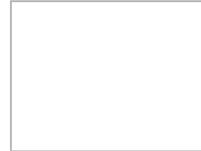
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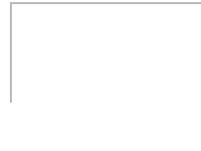
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*Potemkin* could have been made yesterday and remains remarkably modern. The only mistake people make about this film is thinking the iconic Odessa Steps sequence is all they need to know about it.

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It sounds like George Lucas is making a mistake by plundering the world of *Star Wars* for a live action TV series. Hasn't he done enough damage with those three dreadful prequels? But the TV series *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* seemed like an awful idea to everyone in 1993 and that didn't turn out so bad.

Sure, Lucas ensured the show would be a bit plodding thanks to his desire to make it "educational." And the early episodes with a 10 year old Indy being dragged around the world by his parents and tutor were rather dutiful.

But great casting can solve a lot of problems. When Sean Patrick Flanery popped in as the teenage Indy, the show took off. Flanery had the plucky spirit and gee-whiz enthusiasm just perfect for a young Indy; the adventures became more organic and high-spirited once his parents were mostly out of the picture; and the lectures about history and art and so on faded into the background. Indy still bumped into every famous person on the planet - from Thomas Edison to Tolstoy - but it didn't seem so tiresome with Flanery around to get into real scrapes. (It's a shame he didn't get to make the leap to the movies as young Indy, since Lucas planned to make a trilogy around River Phoenix and Flanery would have been a perfect fit.)

But *The Chronicles of Young Indiana Jones Volume One* (\$129.99; Paramount) isn't the TV show, as such. It contains 7 "movies" cobbled together from 2 episodes each and eliminates the framing device of old Indy reminiscing about his younger days. People shouldn't complain too much, since the show was extremely expensive and hardly a big hit. But it would have been nice to get the old Indy scenes included on the extras or at least the pilot in its original form.

Instead we get dozens and dozens of mini-documentaries on the historical figures and eras Indy was involved in, ranging from Norman Rockwell to the suffragette movement. Typically, they're about 20 to 30 minutes long and quite good. So what to say? Those who prefer to see a favorite TV show the way it actually aired will be stuck in limbo for years if not forever, just like the fans of *Star Wars* who lamented Lucas's ban on the original theatrical edition for so many years. (There will never be enough demand to prompt the release of the show in its original form.) Those who might expect loads of extras about the making of this ambitious, globe-trotting show get nothing. Those who prefer the far more popular teen Indy Flanery must pay to get just two Flanery movies tacked onto the five movies of young Indy, rather than sets devoted to each actor. But any families looking for wholesome entertainment that is - gulp - good for you might trick their kids into watching these tales and the fine history lessons that come with them.

Anyone with sense will tell you that the current theatrical hit *The Assassination Of Jesse James By The Coward Robert Ford* has to be seen on the big screen. Besides the riveting performance of Casey Affleck as Ford, it's one of the most beautifully shot films of the year. But thanks to flat panel TVs and home theater sound systems, watching even the most visually stunning films at home isn't cheating yourself anymore. So go ahead and buy *Days of Heaven* (\$39.95; Criterion), the Terence Malick film that clearly inspired *Jesse James* and remains one of the most beautiful films of all time. Your home theater system deserves it.

Was the finale of *The Sopranos* a mistake? Watch the final episodes all over again on *The Sopranos Season Six, Part 2* (\$99.99; HBO) and you'll be better prepared to judge whether that abrupt cut to black was brilliant or a brilliant cop-out. No one can argue that James Gandolfini made no mistake when he oversaw the wrenching documentary *Alive Day Memories: Home From Iraq* (\$24.98; HBO), the film that does our wounded veterans the respect of seeing them and acknowledging them face to face.

Also out this week: Disney's animated flick *Meet The Robinsons* (\$29.99; Disney); *The L Word Complete Fourth Season* (\$55.98; Showtime), because lesbians and the people who love them deserve a guilty pleasure just as much as everyone else; the fascinating *I Was Nineteen* (\$24.95; First Run), which depicts a Soviet soldier of German descent returning home as a victor; Heart embraces the trend of artists performing classic albums in their entirety with *Dreamboat Annie Live* (\$19.98; Shout), an April concert that finds Ann and Nancy Wilson in great voice and doing some terrific encores, though a commentary track or full documentary about the actual making of

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their debut album would have been nice; a three DVD celebration of *Rey Mysterio* (\$34.95; WWE), the "biggest little man" in professional wrestling; director John Huston's triumphant rebound from *Annie* with *Under The Volcano* (\$39.95; Criterion); *Route 66 Season One Volume One* (\$29.98; Infinity Entertainment Group), the classic anthology series disguised as a Kerouac-ian road trip; *A Musical Quartet* (\$69.95; First Run), a compilation of four marvelous classical music documentaries, which would be even more appealing at a lower price; and *The Ruth Rendell Mysteries Set 2* (\$49.99; Acorn), a British anthology series with the usual embarrassment of excellent UK actors.

So tell me, is George Lucas making a mistake by setting a live action TV series in the *Star Wars* universe? Have you ever seen *Young Indiana Jones*? And was Godard a great filmmaker, a one-hit wonder or just a great filmmaker who got bored with the audience?

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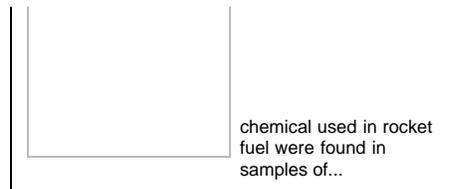
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I don't think it is a total mistake because we have to see what the product looks like. I can declaim the prequels (what an odd word) until the sun stops shining but I still went to see all three and watch them occasionally when they pop up on HBO for the last several months.

Perhaps it was his ego that took over or who knows, but I still enjoyed them, mis-steps and all.

I will have to wait to pass judgement because if he takes the Disney route (have you ever watched those stations? I did when young relatives came for a visit...ohmigawd..sheer drivel)

OR he might do it justice.

I loved the Young Indiana Jones show. Was bummed when it was cancelled and to be honest I wasn't too thrilled in how elderly Indiana was portrayed. I felt he should have had a much more dignified life than what was shown.

I can't speak to the films by Goddard having only seen them years ago and feeling like I just was not as intelligent a filmwatcher as I thought I was.

I just saw Battleship Potemkin and in taking it in the context of when it was filmed it was indeed a great movie. I see it more as a historical film now. NOT about the history it portrayed but rather the history that is the film itself.

I HATED THE ENDING OF THE SOPRANOS! I didn't want to see him gunned down in front of his family but I wanted to see him taken down along with his entire mob. Violent moralless non humans. Fascinating to watch but not to want to emulate, admire or want as neighbors.

My fantasy ending was, since we never saw Drea's actual death, that she had survived the shooting and after years rehab in a private hospital she somehow ends up in. Then she begins her search for revenge by taking out Tony's gang one by one with noone having any idea of who it is doing the killing.

And finally Tony himself gets shot down by her.

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Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Drea killing Tony? I think you've got a future writing fan fiction. That's a fun twist I doubt they ever would have filmed but would be fun to read. And of course you're absolutely right about not pre-judging the Star Wars live action TV show. But I think the standard lately is that the less involved Lucas is the more likely it will be good. The trailers for the three Star wars prequels were stunning. (Not his regular editors, I believe.) The Clone Wars animated series - very hands off by Lucas -- was a lot of fun. So if he sets the TV show in motion but lets others take charge, I'd be hopeful. Since believe he will in fact be deeply involved, I'm less hopeful. But of course I'll be watching the first episode and hoping just like everyone else.

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There are some other interesting DVD releases for this week that weren't mentioned.

I was a huge fan of 'Veronica Mars' and even though the 3 seasons never garnered the kind of ratings that it deserved, the fact that everything is now available on DVD should give a chance for newbies to discover just how much fun this well written series was, and what a delight Kristen Bell is. Plus, if you never saw the original shows when they were broadcast in Hi-Def, the DVDs will finally give you a chance to judge how well the wide-screen series was shot. Series 3 was perhaps the weakest and less all-round cohesive series, but it is still better than the average TV box set. And it was released this week.

How about the greatest film ever made? This week '2001:A Space Odyssey' is released in all formats, regular, Blue Ray and HD with a ton of new extras. I'm told that the film in Hi-Def is stunning and if there is any DVD out there that would get me running for either a Blue-Ray or HD player at Christmas it is this one. Also, other Kubrick movies get the re-release and Hi Def treatment with new extras, but the jewel in the crown has to be 'Odyssey.'

Finally, I think Michael has the Jean-Luc Godard assessment correct. I enjoyed 'Breathless' but have trouble mustering up any enthusiasm to actually sit through most anything else by the famed director, with the exception of maybe 'Tout Va Bien.'

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Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Thanks for your comments. Inevitably, some great DVDs fall through the cracks for various reasons -- often space but more often just practical reasons. I actually haven't received Veronica Mars Season 3 yet and I only got the Kubrick yesterday (literally) after contacting

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Warners. Veronica Mars is indeed a worthy show, even though they fiddled with the formula in desperation towards the end by having mini-mysteries instead of a season long arc like the first best season. The Kubrick set seems to have undone a great injustice since the LAST Warnr Bros. Kubrick box had all sorts of problems, like cropped images (which they claimed was Kubrick's preference over the original theatrical ratio, which seems impossible), only the childishly censored version of Eyes Wide Shut and so on. It's such a vast improvement, I plan to cover it a week late in my next column. Sadly I don't have HD or Blu-Ray yet so can't comment on those versions. I'll commit once the format war is over and that seems at least another year away. Thanks for reading.

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— HLM See Profile I'm a Fan of HLM permalink

Sadly, Mr. Lucas's operating philosophy seems to be based on the fact that there's this 12-year-old boy in Pasadena who still has a quarter in his pocket and George Lucas will not rest until he gets his hands on it.

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— Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

That's very funny. ROTFLOL funny. But since he's a gazillionaire, I'd hate to think money is the driving force. I think he's a great idea man to needs to put faith in others to carry them out. Irvin Kershner did a great job w Empire. Spielberg obviously did a great job with Raiders. The talent behind Clone Wars did a good job. Lucas should NOT be directing. It's as simple as that. And he shouldn't pick a weak director forced to follow his every whim. A strong director won't get enamored with technology or lose sort of the STORY and the acting. But yeah, that 12 year old kid from Pasadena is def going to have to get a paper route if Lucas has his way.

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