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DVDs: "Hannah Montana" VS "Dragonball"



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Can you ever really compare two different movies? If you like Westerns and don't usually like musicals, an OK western will probably appeal to you more than a decent musical. Of course a great musical should give you more enjoyment than a decent Western, assuming you don't break into hives the moment someone breaks into song. It's all arbitrary and critics rarely discuss how simply being in the right mood for a dumb college romp/action flick/sappy romance can make you

enjoy a movie more than you otherwise might. It gets even more confusing when talking about a family film. Do my standards change when watching a movie geared towards kids? Nope. But I might have fun at a movie because I went with my nephews more than I might if I'd gone alone. (Though that still won't make me like *G-Force*.)

Which is a long way around to admitting that on Twitter ([follow me!](#)) I gave *Hannah Montana: The Movie* (\$39.99 regular or \$44.99 on BluRay; Disney) two stars out of four and *Dragonball: Evolution* (\$29.98 regular or \$39.98 on BluRay) just one star, much to the disgust of Adrian, a 12 year old friend of mine who watched all of *Dragonball* with me and got bored with *Hannah* about half way through. (His little sister, Laurel, however, loved it.)

Dragonball: Evolution is the movie that came from a TV show that came from a manga about seven magical dragonballs that must be collected in order to defeat Piccolo before he can take over the world. I kind of like the lead actor Justin Chatwin (he was in *War Of The Worlds* and the TV miniseries *Traffic*), who plays the unfortunately named Goku. But probably two things really kept me from enjoying this film even on a dumb level. One, it co-stars Chow Yun-Fat as Master Roshi, and seeing such a great actor have to perform a secondary role in such a stupid film was upsetting. It would be like watching Clint Eastwood having a secondary role in a bad cop film. (I was gonna say "in *Reno: 91!*" but that's actually something I'd want to watch.) Second, the villain is name Piccolo, which is also the name of a woodwind instrument and about as nonthreatening a name as I can imagine. Heck, even Oboe would have been more nerve-racking than the flighty, playful

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Piccolo. Don't get me wrong: the villain might have been named Destroy-o-con and Master Roshi played by Don Knotts and that wouldn't have made the film more bearable, just less annoying.

Hannah Montana: The Movie has Billy Ray Cyrus in a supporting role, plus the woman from *The Office* (Melora Hardin) who has dated Steve Carrell to hilarious effect. Unlike Chow, I don't care if Billy Ray has a dumb role (and clearly, his daughter can act rings around him). The villain in this film is a British tabloid journalist named Oswald, which actually is sort of scary. There's a funny fight between Hannah and Tyra Banks over some shoes and the story of Hannah heading back down to the farm to get in touch with her Miley roots (and meet a cute cowboy) is predictable but fine. And her rootsy songs (as opposed to the Hannah pop tunes) are pretty darn good. Slapstick sidekick in *Dragonball*? A colorless surfer dude/thief. Slapstick sidekick in *Hannah*? Her dorkily cute brother Jackson (Jason Earles). Totally different movies and neither one is actually good, but I'd rather watch *Hannah Montana* again if I had to, rather than *DE*.

So if you're in the mood for a really dumb action movie, watch something other than *Dragonball: Evolution*. And if you're in the mood for a family friendly light drama with some tuneful music and you can't watch *High School Musical* again no matter how much your kids plead, there are worse things in the world than *Hannah Montana: The Movie*. And if Hannah/Miley and Goku were locked into the Thunderdome in a fight to the finish, my money would be on Hannah. Especially if the winner got some really nice shoes.

Also Out This Week:

Kagemusha (\$39.98 on BluRay; Criterion) -- I often wondered why some Hollywood directors didn't just lend their name to Orson Welles and allow him to make more movies. (Of course, the biggest reason was probably Welles himself, a man paralyzed by his brilliant early success and too unfocused to see countless projects through to fruition -- beginning as early as *The Magnificent Ambersons*.) But sometimes talented directors did behave like the fans they are: that's why George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola are such a happy presence on this DVD. Kurosawa was always more beloved in the West than in Japan. And after cost over-runs and a tyrannical reputation made Japanese studios shy away from him, Kurosawa spent years trying to finance this samurai epic. He tried to work with Hollywood via *Tora! Tora! Tora!* but then backed out, adding to a difficult reputation that Welles might have envied. He even attempted suicide. But finally, Kurosawa won the Oscar for a Russian co-production...and still found himself waiting years to get the money together for *Kagemusha*. Until Lucas and Coppola stepped in, allowing Kurosawa to make this three hour acclaimed classic that led to his final masterpiece, *Ran*. Criterion offers a bevy of extras including an informative essay by Peter Grilli, audio commentary by a scholar, a making-of documentary, the Suntory whiskey ads shot on the set and a 19 minute short in which Lucas and Coppola take a well-deserved bow. Also out on Criterion this week is *Repulsion* (\$39.95 on regular or BluRay), Roman Polanski's fine followup to *Knife In The Water*. It would be followed by two lesser films until *Rosemary's Baby* and *Chinatown* made him a legend forever. It's wonderful and ironic that Criterion -- which always charged a well-deserved premium on laser disc -- sells its movies for the same price on regular or BluRay. Both look smashing, though I must admit with a BluRay player that makes the regular DVD look as sharp as possible, the differences are more modest than usual because Criterion takes such care to provide excellent prints.

Richard Pryor: Live & Smokin' (\$14.95; Genius) -- Here's a fascinating glimpse at Richard Pryor just on the cusp of stardom back in 1971. This 46 minute set filmed in New York finds Pryor a bit overawed by the cameras recording his routine and an audience perhaps overawed by his casual use of the word nigger and raw, sexually explicit take on life. Frankly, the first half of the set is fairly routine despite Pryor's raw edge. He seems a little awkward and the jokes are pretty familiar to audiences today. (Lenny Bruce's routines can seem pretty tame out of context of the times, too.) People aren't quite sure when to laugh, Pryor is nervous and the set doesn't catch fire. Then out of nowhere Pryor launches into an extended monologue portraying two people: a wino and a younger junkie the wino is counseling. Suddenly Pryor is riveting. He creates complete, marvelously detailed characters the way Lily Tomlin would in years to come -- a slurred word, an angry frown, a lean to the right and Pryor has captured the essence of someone; a stock character becomes a genuine person; and it's hilariously heart-breakingly funny. It's leagues beyond the set-up and punchline material Pryor offered earlier in the set. You understand why he became a star and also wonder why he didn't get more dramatic work in the movies. Clearly, Pryor had the talent to do it all.

17 Again (\$28.99 regular and \$35.99 on BluRay; New Line) -- Like *Big*, only littler, this shows how Zac Efron misses out on a basketball scholarship because his girlfriend gets pregnant...and then blames her for everything that goes wrong in the ensuing years. Now middle-aged, facing divorce and looking like Matthew Perry, he bumps into a mysterious janitor and gets turned into



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by Michael Giltz

A cabin of one's own: New England's MacDowell Colony celebrates 100 years of artistic utopia. And the gay and lesbian artists who prospered there celebrate ... (The national gay & lesbian newsmagazine)
by Michael Giltz

Zac Efron again, giving himself another chance to go to high school, get to know his kids and another stab at a basketball scholarship. Lessons SHOULD be learned, but really aren't. Zac is still the BMOG and teaches his son that the way to self-respect is...to be really good at basketball. Very rote. I did, however, love the scene where his nerdy best friend starts dating the principal and takes her out on a date that is disastrous...until they both start speaking Elvish. Geek heaven, that one.

Pete's Dragon (\$29.99; Disney) -- Even as an 11 year old kid (please don't do the math), I remember finding this live-action/animated flick pretty thin going. I was being kind. This attempt to replicate the magic of *Mary Poppins* a decade after Uncle Walt died proves how very difficult family movies can be. Pete is an orphan (natch) who runs away with the help of a dragon who can make himself invisible so he won't scare people. Half the movie is spent with Pete scolding the dragon to behave himself (which usually acts like an over-eager sheep dog) and the other half of the movie involves stars like Mickey Rooney, Red Buttons and Shelley Winters hamming it up. (Co-lead Helen Reddy keeps her head down and the mugging to a minimum.) You know a film is going to be unbearably sweet when the very first song involves a little boy and dragon singing "I love you" to each other. Slightly less than brazzle dazzle-y (a would-be charmer of a tune), but there are lots of extras. Only the smallest of tykes will sit through this one.

Dexter Season Three (\$42.99 regular and \$57.99 on BluRay; Showtime/Paramount) -- My brother's wife really loves this show about a lovable serial killer, but then she watches any and every forensic, crime, murder, DNA-searching mystery show out there. Of course, the acclaim has been strong. But any show not on HBO can get tons of acclaim and if it's on a pay cable channel you don't get, it can just...slip by. I knew I'd want to watch it sometime, but I relied for years on the acclaim of others to describe this show rather than watching it myself. Plus, **Michael C. Hall is a terrific actor** but somehow I confused the actor with the role yet again and wasn't certain if the needy, wimpy fellow from *Six Feet Under* could freak me out. Well, he could and he can. I've just dived into Season One and the black humor, penetrating dialogue and fascinating premise (a young adopted man is trained by his cop father to blend into society, fake emotions and use his proclivity for murder only to punish the truly guilty who have escaped the law) have me hooked. If grisly crime scenes have you fast forwarding rather than reaching for the pause button so you can search for clues, this may not be the show for you. But if you've been thinking of checking it out and just haven't done so yet, by all means jump in.

Olivia (\$16.99; Nickelodeon) -- Books are a funny thing, especially picture books and children's books -- we identify with them so strongly and on such a basic level that any adaptation of them that doesn't hit exactly the right note can be off-putting. I never came up with any firm idea of how I thought Olivia would look or sound in a TV show, but as soon as I saw this computer-animated series, I thought...nope. That's not it. The animation just doesn't feel like the right style for the very old school Olivia, who counts Eleanor Roosevelt as a hero, among others. I find the delightful picture books by Ian Falconer wonderful and **have written about them for years**. I do think these eight tales capture the spirit of Olivia quite well and they're certainly not bad. But I can't help thinking they failed to match the proper style of animation for this material.

The Beatles Rare and Unseen (\$14.95; MVD) -- I enjoyed watching this 90 minute grab-bag of old Beatles footage and new interviews. John Lennon chatting with French TV? On set footage from *Help?* The only existing film from their 1964 tour of Scotland? Count me in! Of course, I'm also foaming at the mouth to purchase the Beatles boxed sets of their remastered albums -- both the stereo AND the mono versions. None of it is revealing or revelatory in the least. But if you care, you care.

The 5 Deadly Venoms (\$19.97; Genius) -- I'm no martial arts movie expert, though I've seen my fair chunk of the masterpieces. Funnily enough, martial arts fighting can date just as easily as special effects. You'd think fighting is fighting but the way they're staged, edited and the sound effects that accompany them can age faster than a guy in a gorilla suit in a jungle epic. So *The 5 Deadly Venoms* may be influential in one way or another. But all I know is that it's a "classic" martial arts movie in that the subtlety is poor, the acting poorer and most of the fights are pretty tame by today's standards. It perks up considerably at the finale, where vague hints of fantastical powers come to the fore (such as fighters perched on a wall high off the ground while fighting their enemies) but it was too little too late for me. Extras include commentary by Hong Kong cinema expert Bey Logan, who unquestionably knows much more than me but can't change how bored I was while watching this. Also out is *An Empress and the Warriors* (\$19.97; Genius) which was directed by the guy who did the action choreography for *Hero* and *House Of Flying Daggers* and therefore deserves to direct as much as he can.

Inglorious Basterds (\$34.95 on BluRay; Severin) -- With Quentin Tarantino's tremendously fun *Inglorious Basterds* opening today, it's a good time to catch up with B movie maestro Enzo Castellari's film of the same name, which Tarantino loves. His movie is not a remake of this one,

though it uses the same WW II setting and the same name (with an incorrect spelling to keep copy editors in a cold sweat). This flick is akin to *Dirty Dozen*, with convicted criminals finding themselves behind enemy lines and deciding to kick a little Nazi ass. It's goofy fun as a one-shot experience and Tarantino's exuberant interview with the director is definitely manic fun as well.

Tyson (\$28.96 regular and \$39.95 on BluRay; Sony) -- A James Toback documentary that presents boxer Mike Tyson as a deep thinker. Beyond the silly shots of the boxer strolling on a beach and offering philosophical musings, the movie is an interesting portrait of the man's life. It humanizes Tyson, who is quite self-aware and self-critical, though calling him noble, as Toback did, or trying to insist he's complicated is a stretch. Tyson isn't remotely complicated. He's a poorly educated kid from a very poor background who became fabulously wealthy and famous and then -- like so many others -- frittered it all away in drugs, sex, boorish even criminal behavior and sheer stupidity (bad contracts and the such). Tyson does take responsibility for his actions, though he still doesn't have anything but bitter words for the woman he was convicted of raping in the 90s. On the other hand, most of the film is just Tyson talking on camera and given his lisp, high-pitched voice and propensity for mangling vocabulary, it is very notable that the film is in fact engaging and interesting. I wouldn't have imagined Tyson could hold forth at length. The deepest he gets in self-analysis is to say he was surrounded by leeches and that he and Robin Givens were just kids, but still. Among the many boxing and interview clips, we get to see Tyson's harangue at a heckler during a press conference where he repeatedly uses homophobic slurs (because of course that's the worst thing he can imagine), telling a man off camera that he'll "fuck you in the ass in front of everybody, you faggot" and on and on. That makes his cameo in "Black and White" where Robert Downey Jr. hit on him all the more amusing. And the idea that he's a philosopher-king all the sillier.

Roundup of Other Releases

Icons of SciFi: Toho Collection (\$24.96; Sony) does a very good job of presenting this ok trio of monster movies in both their US and Japanese versions; *Greek Chapter Three* (\$39.99; Disney) continues the sweet stories of my favorite primetime soap; *The Color Of Magic* (\$14.95; Genius) proves that if fantasy is hard to do on screen than comic fantasy is even harder -- Terry Pratchett's Discworld still exists best on the printed page; *Everybody Hates Chris Season Four* (\$39.99; Paramount) brings to a sweet conclusion the perennially under-appreciated sitcom with an excellent cast -- Chris Rock can hold his head high on this one; *The Golden Boys* (\$27.98; Lionsgate) shows three grumpy old men (Rip Torn, Bruce Dern and David Carradine) hitting on Mariel Hemingway when they should have been trying to fix her up with one of their grandsons; Amanda Burton stakes out her own quiet bit of turf in the touch-as-nails female professional with a miserable social life genre with *The Helen West Casebook* (\$49.99; Acorn), though Helen Mirren still looms large; *House Season Five* (\$59.98; Universal) is quite a let down after the solid reboot of Season Four, with soap-y personal lives intruding more and more into the formula of crazy medical cases that are diagnosed and diagnosed and then cracked at the end as easily as Perry Mason grilling a witness on the stand with five minutes to go in the show; *Californication Season Two* (\$42.99; Showtime/Paramount) proves beyond a shadow that David Duchovny is an excellent comic actor who has yet to get the film roles he deserves; *90210 Season One* (\$49.99; Paramount) I'm still watching it for the scenes with the actors from the original series and that ain't good, even if it did work for *DeGrassi*.

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What I often do is watch musicals and "family movies" ala "Mystery Science Theater 3000". That is, I heckle them the whole way through. Then, I review them on imdb and brag about how I heckled them. Sometimes, I do compare them to different kinds of movies. I contrasted "Cinderella" with "Army of Darkness"; "My Dream Is Yours" with "Grindhouse"; "Bedknobs and Broomsticks" with "Snakes on a Plane". When possible, I talk about how "The Simpsons" spoofed the movie ("Bye, Bye Birdie" and "The Sound of Music"). Or, in the case of "Mary Poppins", I related it to "The Dick Van Dyke Show", saying that I expected Buddy to make a joke about Cooley's bald head.

While I was studying in St. Petersburg in 2005, in one of the classes we watched a movie based on an Aleksandr Pushkin novel. This had to be the most boring movie in history. My review that I wrote for the class totally trashed the movie. I dedicated the review to Bob Denver, who had died a few weeks earlier. Therefore, I'm probably the only person to related "Gilligan's Island" to Aleksandr Pushkin.

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