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DVDs: "It's A Wonderful Life," Again?

Posted December 19, 2007 | 03:02 PM (EST)

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Everyone knows that the Jimmy Stewart film *It's A Wonderful Life* (\$24.99; Paramount) is a classic. If you don't own it, you should. It's even more powerful in July than it is during the holidays, when it's surrounded by so many other seasonal treats. But why did they put out a Two-Disc Collector's Set? Didn't they just put out a 60th Anniversary edition last year?

In fact, why do so many movies keep coming out in "new" editions, versions that use any anniversary as an excuse to repackage a film that came out years ago? Fans used to get annoyed (rightly) when they would buy a new movie and then six months later a deluxe edition with all sorts of tantalizing extras came out. But that's not what we're talking about here. Yes, every version of *The Princess Bride* (\$19.98; MGM) or *National Treasure* (\$29.99; Disney) or *Braveheart* (\$19.99; Paramount) is slightly different. (They've all come out - again - in the last few months.) But lately, it can be hard to even figure out what's different from one "deluxe" edition one year to a "collector's edition" the next.

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You see it on CDs, too, where a recent Bob Dylan 3 CD set (\$49.98; Columbia Legacy) drew shrugs from everyone. It contained nothing new and seemed utterly pointless. (Though if you didn't own any Dylan, it would also blow your mind.) So why are they flooding us with all these marginally different

editions? In a word: Wal-Mart.

With the decline of music and video stores like Tower, the major players when it comes to selling CDs and DVDs are big box stores like Wal-Mart, Kmart and Best Buy. And they're not really in the music or movie business. (In fact, the floor space devoted to them has been shrinking.) You can't walk into a Wal-Mart and find the deep catalog that Tower once boasted. Heck, you can't even go into Wal-Mart and expect to find classic bestsellers like the Beatles catalog or Pink Floyd. It's even

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worse with movies. They stock new releases and when those releases are gone, they just don't get re-ordered. Sure, a really hot title might get restocked for a few weeks or months. But an old movie like *The Princess Bride*? When the last copy was sold, it was gone from the shelf. They just don't stock "old" titles.

The result? If movie studios or record companies want a title stocked, they have to repackage it and pretend it's a new release. Columbia knew the Bob Dylan movie *I'm Not There* would spur interest in his catalog. They also knew Wal-Mart and Kmart and the like weren't about to order copies of old albums like *Blonde on Blonde* or *Bring It All Back Home*. So they threw together a "new" greatest hits album and could at least guarantee anyone browsing the racks would find that.

The same holds true for movies. Studios know people are always ready to buy a classic like *The Princess Bride*. Or they know the sequel to *National Treasure* will send people to the store to buy the original. So they create a "special edition" and get stores to restock it. That's what happens when people who don't really care about movies and music are the main stores that sell them. And that's why you keep seeing a flood of not-so-special editions.

Also out this week: the low-key gem *Once* (\$29.99; Fox), a real delight that deserved its long run in the theaters; *Young Indiana Jones Volume Two: The War Years* (\$129.99; Paramount), which is the real heart of the TV series, all devoted to a certain era (World War I) giving this set a focus that makes it more like an extended miniseries - and the extras are exceptional; *The Simpsons Movie* (\$29.99; Fox) which was just funny enough to make me wish they'd call it a day on the TV show and make movies every two or three years (surely a Halloween movie is a natural?); *Bring It On: In It To Win It* (\$29.98; Universal), the latest, harmless edition in the direct-to-DVD sequels to the cheerleading flick; *Kissology Vol. 3* (\$36.98; VHI Classics), the third and final volume (for the moment) by the heavy metal band; *The Bronx Is Burning World Championship Edition* (\$59.99; ESPN), with new extras including a Yankee cap, team photo and the entire game six - from back when cheating referred to cheating towards third; *The Mod Squad Season 1 Volume 1* (\$38.99; Paramount), which was oh-so-cool and is now slightly silly but still well-acted and a great time capsule; three more entries in the exemplary Disney Treasures series with *The Chronological Donald Volume Three* (\$32.99; Disney) ideal for the kids, *The Adventures of Oswald* geared towards serious animation buffs (\$32.99; Disney) and *Disneyland: Secrets, Stories & Magic* (\$32.99; Disney) strictly for hardcore theme park fans; *Sonic Underground* (\$29.99; Shout), which collects 20 episodes of the third (!) series spun off from the video game, combining fights against bad guys with a rock band on the side a la Josie & The Pussycats; *Halloween* (\$29.95; Dimension/Genius), Rob Zombie's reboot of the Seventies classic; the messy fantasy *Stardust* (\$29.99; Paramount); *Kaspar Hauser* (\$24.95; Kino), the acclaimed film about the real-life German story akin to Anastasia's; and *One Tree Hill Complete Fourth Season* (\$59.98; Warner Bros.), an essential primer for those preparing for the fast-forward leap taking place in the fifth season.

And for fans of holiday titles: a crush of holiday-themed DVDs have come out in the past few weeks and months, including 1976's *Captain & Tennille - The Christmas Show*, available on its own (\$14.98; Retroactive) or as part of a C&T boxed set (\$45.98; Retroactive); *The Johnny Cash Christmas Specials 1976 and 1977* (\$14.98 each; Shout), with the '77 show especially good; *Christmas Television Favorites* (\$39.98; Warner Bros.), with eight specials/movies, including gems like *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* and *The Year Without A Santa Claus*, as well as some nice shorts; *MGM's Holiday Collection* (\$29.98; MGM), including Cary Grant's sweet *The Bishop's Wife* (1947), Laurel & Hardy's 1934 *March of the Wooden Soldiers* and Frank Capra's so-so 1961 remake of his own movie *Pocketful Of Miracles*; the excellent *Chuck Jones Collection* (\$14.98; Lionsgate) with six specials including *A Very Merry Cricket*; *A Very Special Christmas 20th Anniversary Music Video Collection* (\$14.98; A&M), which benefits Special Olympics; Berkley Breathed's sweet and silly *A Wish For Wings That Work* (\$14.98; Universal); *The Pink Panther - A Pink Christmas* (\$14.98; MGM), with three shorts including the holiday show; and finally, the gut-bustingly funny, profane and not very wholesome or inspiring collection *Christmastime in South Park* (\$19.99; Paramount).

So what's your favorite holiday viewing tradition? Is it *A Christmas Story*? The Alastair Sim 1951 *A Christmas Carol*? Something else?

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You're completely wrong. I got the new special edition version of "Wonderful Life" and it WAS different. All the scenes with Clarence the angel were re-edited so that he was played by Andrew Dice Clay in drag. Two thumbs up!

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For \$24.99 Paramount-- or whoever owns Paramount now-- could at least have a better cover than that Disney-eque picture on this latest edition. A reproduction of the original movie poster, perhaps?

The same thing is happening with the new edition of "The Apartment"-- Jack Lemmon, Shirley MacLaine, and Fred MacMurray all huddled together with big smiles on their faces as if, friends-wise, they're happy as can be. Not exactly the theme of the actual movie!

Instead of countless new editions, can we please have Jimmy Stewart in "The Jackpot," "Take Her,

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She's Mine," and "Dear Brigitte"? And Shirley MacLaine in "Ask Any Girl"? And Jack Lemmon in "Good Neighbor Sam"? Thanks, SantaCorp.!

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Another example of this with music CDs.

Pink Floyd had a box set, "Shine On" which featured remasters of 8 of their discs (including one that wasn't particularly old :p). This included a disc with their 4 early singles and 4 b-sides.

They have a new box set, "By the way", which contains all 14 of their studio albums (16 discs-the wall is 2 discs and ummagamma has a live disc and studio disc).

This is in addition to their recent best of, "Echoes", which contained 1 song not otherwise easily obtained.

And of course the original cd releases, plus the gold remasters, plus 25, 30, 35 (dark side of the moon, I'm looking at you)and upcoming 40 year anniversary versions, plus various remasters (I see a new set of all their cds as 2008 imports on amazon).

You'd think, in a business sense, they'd include more (or any) rare stuff in there so people like me who own all the albums (at least 1 version, if not 2) would be TEMPTED to buy it.

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