

DVDs: "Mad Max: Fury Road," "Citizenfour," The Who At Shea Stadium And The Usual Crush Of TV Stuff

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It just keeps coming. Season after season of show after show. TV may be in a golden age but it's starting to feel a little overwhelming. First, let's start with one of the best reviewed movies of 2015, one of the best reviewed documentaries of 2014, The Who in concert and an odd little show that would never be made today (except it has).

MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (\$44.95 BluRay; Warner Home Video)

LA SAPIENZA (\$34.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

Director George Miller is one of the most fascinating talents working in movies today. The only reason he isn't more acclaimed to high heaven is his propensity to jump around in both genre and tone and style. Steven Spielberg has equally commercial instincts but you feel you know a Spielberg film whenever you see one, be it a bleak drama, a family tale or a roller coaster ride. But what links movies as disparate as the dystopian Mad Max, the gripping medical drama Lorenzo's Oil, the delightful Babe (which Miller produced) and its darker, wackier sequel Babe: Pig In The City or the animated musical Happy Feet? Just when he seems to have settled into warmer territory, here comes the outrageous, over the top adrenaline rush and downright silly Mad Max: Fury Road. I started giggling in the first five minutes and frankly never stopped, from the absurd milk slaves to the rock and rolling electric guitarist strapped to the front of a vehicle who provided a live score for the action scenes taking place. This is giddy, helium-inducing stuff, its proto-feminist message notwithstanding. And it's certainly not for all tastes. But if you savor the nonstop action of The Road Warrior, here's the first film of its type in a long time where the action scenes actually make sense and are cut together so you know what's going on at all times. Masterful. And Charlize Theron makes a magnetic action star. I counted about ten lines of dialogue and that was fine with me.

Mad Max: Fury Road demands to be seen on the big screen so I hope your TV is a big one. La Sapienza may be the polar opposite in tone and style but it too demands to be seen on a big screen. The movie is formally gorgeous and its pacing and deliberate nature means it plays a lot better when you're trapped in a cinema for two hours. At home, the temptation to be distracted and head to the loo or grab another snack or answer the phone and so on will play demons with this quiet, "challenging" story of a troubled marriage somehow reinvigorated by being immersed in the glorious architecture of the Italian master Francesco Borromini. Architects and their groupies will want to watch this one alone: the cinematography of Raphaël O'Byrne is almost indecently beautiful.

CITIZENFOUR (\$26.99 BluRay; Starz/Anchor Bay)

SEVENTEEN (\$24.98 DVD; Icarus)

You've undoubtedly heard of Citizenfour. Even if you haven't seen it, the story of Edward Snowden meeting secretly with two journalists overseas to hand them a cache of documents about illegal activities of the US government made worldwide headlines. Imagine if Woodward and Bernstein filmed their meetings with Deep

Throat and you begin to appreciate the fly on the wall excitement generated by this movie. I have friends who insist on analyzing Snowden and demanding his intentions be pure. Who cares? He revealed shocking and criminal behavior of the federal government and as a whistle blower he behaved responsibly in finding journalists who would treat sensitive government documents with the appropriate care. This was no WikiLeaks data dump. Maybe it's the ink-stained wretch in me that I always longed to be, but this is gripping drama.

You undoubtedly haven't heard of *Seventeen*. Why would you? It's a documentary film, the finale to *Middletown*, a six part series for PBS that focused on Muncie, Indiana back in 1982. It's a landmark work, one of the most ground-breaking and fascinating works public television has ever produced...and it hasn't been easily available ever since. *Seventeen* is a mildly notorious look at teenagers; for the time it was controversial in its casual depiction of cursing and an interracial romance. Think of it as like *Larry Clark* but without the luridness. PBS flipped out and chose not to air it. But *Seventeen* went on to win the first Grand Jury Prize for Documentary at Sundance and gain critical acclaim when it was released theatrically. By all means, watch it. But if you've the slightest interest in documentaries, the entire *Middletown* series is still available on DVD and is remarkable in its ambition and execution. I'm not sure the same concept could be tackled today (reality TV has made too many folk camera savvy), but it would be worth trying.

ELEMENTARY SEASON THREE (\$55.98 DVD; Paramount)

THE WALKING DEAD SEASON FIVE (\$79.99 BluRay; Anchor Bay)

NCIS SEASON TWELVE (\$55.98 DVD; Paramount)

THE BLACKLIST SEASON TWO (\$75.99 BluRay; Sony)

I'm not sure why the UK reboot *Sherlock* gets all the attention. Yes, I too love the chemistry of Benedict Cumberbatch and the inestimable Martin Freeman. But *Elementary* has it all over that tarted-up rehash of old plots. This modern spin on a recovering addict Holmes (Jonny Lee Miller, never better) and his companion/minder/friend Watson (Lucy Liu, ditto) has everything one could want: a fresh take on the classic duo, clever new storylines and nods to iconic elements like Holmes's smarter brother. *Elementary* has emotional depth and clever plots and I really enjoy the hell out of it. Frankly, I hope the next season is its last (ratings have grown a little soft) just so they can wind it up in style.

Has *The Walking Dead* grown a little tired? I sense people not absorbed in the twists and turns like they were at first. You can't keep folk on the edge of their seat for five years of course. And I suspect some have checked out, planning to catch up with the show once it's all wrapped up; that's not a comment on quality, just the preferred way to watch a serialized story like this one rather than dribble it out. On the other hand, not too many folk were thrilled with the twists this season. Still, ratings are huge, the spin-off launched big and I hope they start to focus on the finish line (season 7? 8?) so the tension can ratchet up instead of petering out.

You can't complain about the quality of *NCIS*. This is TV comfort food, the sort CBS is the acknowledged king of in primetime. No one makes soothing drama like the #1 network and *NCIS* is the world beater that proves it. It could go on forever, seemingly, and just might, with its family of cast members interacting with each other in dependable but modestly changing ways over the years. I've never watched an entire season from start to finish because I never felt the need. Has anyone? And yet it's always there, like mac and cheese or potato chips whenever one feels the need. Oh, that's not dismissive. This is not "quality" TV but it is most definitely dependable TV.

The *Blacklist* has higher goals. This NBC drama was an out and out smash in season one. In season two, they did two things. First, it went head to head against ABC's red-hot drama *Scandal* on Thursday at 9 pm, despite NBC having absolutely nothing to offer as a lead in or lead out. Nonetheless, *The Blacklist* brought its own fans and slowly chipped away until by the end of the season it was winning its time period. Second, they decided to have fun. The show might have been weighed down by a sense of seriousness. Instead they went hog wild with the theatrics: James Spader chewed every bit of scenery with relish and the plots became positively baroque. It

climaxed with a major twist at the season finale. Too often, when a show changes EVERYTHING, it ends up changing nothing and reverts right back to where it was after a few new episodes. (I'm looking at you Battlestar Galactica!) Hopefully, they'll have the courage of their ballsy choice and make all of season three a real departure. It's sure to be fun, no matter what.

THE WHO LIVE AT SHEA STADIUM (\$19.98 BluRay; Eagle Rock Entertainment)

THE REBEL: THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$59.97 DVD; Timeless Media/Shout! Factory)

WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS SHORT FILMS COLLECTION (\$39.99 BluRay; Disney)

Here are three new releases with nothing in common except passionate fans, fans who made these releases possible by their demand it happen.

The Who is of course an iconic rock band. While they would tour on and off for years to come and even release a new album in 2006, for all intents and purposes their swan song came 33 years ago with the album It's Hard and the tour that followed. While Rolling Stone may have misguidedly praised the album to high heaven in 1982, time has not been overly kind to it, "Eminence Front" aside. After that? Nothing, at least creatively. Nonetheless, they remain a fiery live act and in 1982 the band certainly had something to prove in terms of continued relevance post-Keith Moon. So here they are at Shea Stadium, delivering a strong set captured decently in this film. It's not a lost masterpiece but Roger Daltrey and Pete Townsend are up to their usual one-upmanship, the late John Entwistle is his typically understated but masterful self on bass and drummer Kenney Jones is alternately indifferent or pissed off enough to keep things interesting. At two hours and 20 minutes, with a 25 song set and another three bonus songs from night one at Shea, this is another snapshot of one of the great live acts in rock. It's not for newbies, but serious fans can rest assured they'll get their money's worth.

Somewhere there must be a fan club devoted to the TV show The Rebel. Today, it seems a little bizarre: a half hour western with a former Confederate soldier as its hero? (Oh wait, that's the focus of AMC's Hell On Wheels.) Johnny Yuma (he's a rebel!) is haunted by the violence he experienced and vows to roam the West, seeking to do good. (And to atone for his sins, wonders a Yankee?) The politics are vague here; war is hell and Yuma is a good man but his being a Confederate veteran adds a modest tension for modern viewers that makes it a tad more interesting than perhaps intended. Johnny Cash sang the great title song and this was the dream project of star Nick Adams: he oversaw everything on the show from the writing to the design and even had his wife act in an episode. (Toss in the possibility that Adams was gay and the undercurrents on display grow exponentially.) Tragically, Adams died at 36 but this is a pretty good legacy. All the contextual analysis in the world doesn't change the fact that this was a pretty routine, but pretty good Western. It only lasted two seasons but in those days that added up to 76 episodes. They're all here along with some modest extras that are quite welcome in a package fans are lucky exists at all.

Animation buffs look forward to the shorts that Disney produces in front of their feature films and with good reason. They're one of the few, high budget, quality animated shorts being created in this day and age. New talent often gets a start with a Disney short and if they prove their chops soon graduate to bigger fare. This grab-bag of recent Disney shorts naturally varies in quality. Some tales like "The Little Match Girl" with its sad ending and focus on death are worth previewing by parents before showing to the very young. But all in all, this is a good collection with some real winners, like Mickey Mouse's "Get A Horse!" "Feast," and my personal favorite "Tangled Ever After," an hilarious bit of action comedy with sensational animation that brings the personality of the horse Maximus from Tangled front and center with excellent results.

ELENA (\$34.99 BluRay; Zeitgeist)

ALOHA (\$30.99 BluRay; Sony)

Director Andrey Zvyagintsev is one of the best directors in the world. His Leviathan was just nominated for an Oscar (and deserved to win). He's also delivered a remarkable feature debut in The Return, 2007's The

Banishment and this subtle, Hitchcockian drama of a nurse who marries her wealthy widowed patient, tries to keep a lid on her needy and somewhat out of control children and does whatever must be done to ensure her survival. It's quietly tense, elegant filmmaking from the poker-faced performance of Nadezhda Markina as Elena to the marvelous score by Philip Glass.

Director Cameron Crowe used to be considered one of the best directors in the world. But the poisonous critical reviews and hostile audience rejection of Aloha might lead you to believe he'd delivered a movie about drowning puppies and kicking cats. Instead, it's a throwback of sorts to screwball comedies that was marketed as a gentle romance. Sure the movie uses Hawaii as a backdrop for white actors. Aren't Hawaiians depressingly used to that by now? On the other hand, Emma Stone is playing a character who is specifically Hawaiian and yet doesn't look Hawaiian, so her casting is hardly a travesty. I continue to perversely believe I don't care for actor Bradley Cooper and he continues to force me to say, "but he's not bad here." If you're of a mind, set aside any preconceptions and maybe you'll be modestly surprised. And remember, it's supposed to be funny!

GREY'S ANATOMY SEASON ELEVEN (\$45.99 DVD; Disney)

MIKE & MOLLY SEASON FIVE (\$24.98 DVD; Warner Home Video)

THE GOOD WIFE SEASON SIX (\$55.98 DVD; Paramount)

Finally, three shows that have seen better days. What is Grey's Anatomy without its central romance? We'll find out in season 12, assuming fans return. But the abrupt loss of Patrick Dempsey is just about the only way one could shake up the show without making a mockery of the many twists and turns it had taken in the past. This is an unapologetic primetime soap, with Grey's Anatomy the over-arching home of an ever-changing cast of characters, like General Hospital where some stalwart regulars oversee the latest brood of hopeful doctors and nurses getting into the usual romantic knots while trying to prove their mettle. It's not MY General Hospital, anymore than season 11 of this show is MY Grey's Anatomy. (For me, it ended when the soulful center of the show T. R. Knight departed in 2009.)

Mike & Molly was never my sitcom. I always found this show about two plus-sized people staring down a world prejudiced against fat to be relentlessly obsessed with fat jokes. Barely a scene could pass in season one without some weight-based humor. It quickly overrode my appreciation for the charms of star Melissa McCarthy. (And then she decided the world needed a female Chris Farley when I saw her more as a modern Rosalind Russell, sharp-tongued and self-confident, thank you very much.) Now with season five they've taken a turn that's about as convincing as when Roseanne won the lottery. Here, Molly follows her dream of being a writer, sells a book, sees it published and then dives into her next one. A big advance? Yeah right. Surely it would have made more sense for her to be self-published and hit a nerve with the public. Nonetheless, most every element of this storyline is absurd, divorcing the show from reality once and for all.

Finally, The Good Wife. Another death throws fans for a loop and this time they are not happy. I'm always happy to see the talented and appealing Matt Czuchry put behind bars for any reason whatsoever. But season six was a wash, with the characters and the behind the scenes crew still reeling from a choice that left the series unmoored. I don't think it will ever recover. I've always felt The Good Wife was a glossy soap given a gloss of class by an exceptionally good cast. Others I respect found it to be one of the best shows on TV for three or so years. Whether you think it went off the rails or revealed its manipulative heart, The Good Wife is not so good anymore.

NOTE: Prices and format are strictly based on what is made available to me for review. If they give me a DVD, that's the format and list price I include. Needless to say, every title here is often available in multiple disc formats not to mention on demand and via streaming so the list price included is virtually never what you'll pay and the format is always just one of many ways for seeing the work reviewed.

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