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DVDs: "Mad Men Season 2" Gets Darker



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With the new season just around the corner in mid-August, it's a good time to catch up with Mad Men. Season 2 (\$49.98; Lionsgate) was a little shaky at times: the detour to Los Angeles, the disintegration of any happiness for almost anyone on the show, January Jones picking up strange men in bars, the deeply upsetting rape of Joan Holloway (a terrific Christina Hendricks) by her vile fiance -- exactly how dark was this show going to get? Very. I'm most relieved about the choices the show didn't make: I'm glad career gal Peggy Olson's (Elizabeth Moss) friendship with a

young priest (Colin Hanks) hasn't become sexual. I'm glad office weasel Pete Campbell (Vincent Kartheiser) has yet one more chance to be accepted as one of the guys and not become just a backstabber or toady. And I'm glad Don and Betty haven't got divorced (yet). Make them miserable, but don't let them split up or the show will atomize along with them. The DVD set comes in a nifty box designed to look like your white business shirt has come back from the dry cleaners and is ready to go. Extras include copious commentaries on every episode and brief featurettes on the changing role of women, fashion and the actual events of the era. Mad Men is one show that definitely rewards careful rewatching.

DO THE RIGHT THING (\$19.98; Universal) -- It would be wrong to ignore the social and political significance of this movie's accomplishments, but those only matter because it works as a film. First and foremost, Do The Right Thing is a blisteringly funny movie about the hottest day of the summer in Brooklyn that creates full-blooded characters both for the customers of a pizzeria and the bigoted owner (Danny Aiello). No one would care about Spike Lee smashing up the windows of the joint and what that might mean if we didn't already care about the people in the movie. The extras include a making of at the time, a look back today, a new commentary track by Lee, the original commentary with Lee and DP Ernest Dickerson among others, the press

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conference from Cannes in 1989 and more. Obviously, one of the best movies of the 1980s. I always cite the wrenching documentary *4 Little Girls* as the best movie Spike Lee ever made but this is remarkable as well.

**PEYTON PLACE PART TWO** (\$39.99; Shout) -- The *Dallas* of its day, this is a steamy primetime soap that made stars of Ryan O'Neal and Mia Farrow as the wholesome heroine at the heart of the scandalous goings-on of a New England town. Like *Dallas*, the plotline in Part Two is circling around a murder mystery, though personally I'm on the edge of my seat waiting for the rebellious Farrow to freak out over her stardom and cut off her long flowing hair, launching headlines and a fashion trend at the same time.

**ELDORADO** (\$24.95; Film Movement) -- Essentially a road movie, this is the shaggy dog story of a burly middle-aged man Yvan who comes home to find a burglar named Elie ransacking his place. You immediately know you're in offbeat territory when this tense scene devolves into a comic standoff, with Yvan insisting the burglar come out of his hiding place and the burglar refusing. Naturally, of course, he ends up offering the burglar a ride home. "Home" happens to be quite far away and after initially dropping the kid off at a crossroads, when Yvan finds the kid still stranded hours later he really takes him home. Thus begins a peripatetic journey involving nudists, swingers, rainy nights out doors and a burgeoning friendship of sorts. Gently amusing but always with an undertone of sadness, this is a sweet little film that ends very well -- hitting just the right note and avoiding easy resolutions that you might expect. I wouldn't want to oversell it -- it's strictly for cineastes and adventurous film buffs. But this is the classic "promising" first feature that is pretty good and might very well be the start of an interesting career for Belgian director Bouli Lanners.

**TOM AND JERRY: THE CHUCK JONES COLLECTION** (\$26.98; Warner Bros.) and **TOM AND JERRY'S GREATEST CHASES Vol. 2** (\$14.98; Warner Bros.) -- Hmm, Chuck Jones? I've never been a fan of the Tom and Jerry cartoons, to say the least. Simplistic, dull, repetitive and tiresome -- I'd call them the poor man's *Wile E Coyote* and *Roadrunner*, but I'm not a big fan of THOSE cartoons either. (Mind you, they play like witty plays by Oscar Wilde compared to Tom and Jerry.) But Chuck Jones is one of the giants of animation. Maybe his Tom and Jerry shorts have an elan and cleverness the others lack. So I popped in the disc and...nope. Apparently, you can have Orson Welles direct the Ritz Brothers but it would still be the Ritz Brothers and not the Marx Brothers. The saving grace of the Chuck Jones set -- which contains 34 shorts and no, I most assuredly did NOT watch them all -- is a delightful, poignant profile of Jones in which he talks about his childhood, stories that combine on camera interviews and casual, charming animation. It's an Oscar-worthy 26 minute ode to one of the greats. *Greatest Chases Vol. 2* contains 14 more shorts, so clearly the Chuck Jones set is a better bargain for those who care.

**SHERLOCK HOLMES** (\$24.95; Kino) -- As a Sherlock Holmes buff, I was intrigued to finally see this 1922 silent film version starring John Barrymore. Not only do you get to see Barrymore in top form, it's the closest I'll get to seeing the exceptionally popular stage play it sprang from. The result is intriguing, especially for those already fans of Holmes. We see Holmes as a college student just developing his ideas about detection when the travails of a fellow Oxfordian bring him face to face with future arch nemesis Moriarty (played by the cadaverous Gustav von Seyffertitz, who is so morbid you assume his day job is as an undertaker). Seyffertitz is the best thing here -- he plays Moriarty with a compelling stillness that rivets your attention. But you also get William Powell's film debut, not to mention gossip queen Hedda Hopper in an early acting role and stalwart British film presence Reginald Denny. But of course it's Holmes you pay the most attention to here. Barrymore has the angular, inquisitive features that are perfect for the role and his bounding youth grows quite nicely into the sober detective. It's disconcerting to see Holmes moon over a girl but how were they to know in 1922 that Holmes always should be a confirmed bachelor? The film is one of four in a John Barrymore boxed set (\$59.95; Kino) from the always dependable Kino. Also included are *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Tempest*, and the eye-opening (for me) spectacle *The Beloved Rogue*, which is the most fun of all. John is where the legend of the Barrymores really began (sorry, Lionel) and rightly so.

**FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS THIRD SEASON** (\$29.98; Universal) -- It's never happened before. At least in my mind, no TV series has ever started out so critically acclaimed as *Friday Night Lights* in season one, collapsed completely on a creative level in season two and then rebounded so completely and successfully in season three. How did they do it? By pulling a *Dallas* and essentially pretending that Season Two never happened. Seriously, you could skip from Season One to Season Three and not miss a beat. All the bad ideas of Season Two (the murder and cover-up, the bitterness in the marriage of Coach Taylor and his wife, their daughter dumping sweet quarterback Matt Saracen, Lyla Garrity's unconvincing conversion to hardcore Christianity, Coach Taylor leaving town for a job at the college level -- all of it, literally all of it, is just ignored or dismissed in

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seconds. The show may not achieve the heights of Season One (which can be watched very satisfyingly on its own) but it's a strong show with one of the best casts on TV. And fans can rest assured the show's creators probably won't screw up again: they've got a guaranteed Season Four and Five thanks to a deal between NBC and Direct TV. They'll presumably air the 13 episodes for each season starting in the winter (football's off season) just like everyone was yelling at them to do in the first place and it will come to a nice finale in 2011. Just make sure you skip Season Two.

**THE QUEENS OF COUNTRY** (\$24.98; MPI) -- This bargain set brings together three modest one hour DVDs that bring together all the TV performances they could get the rights to of three women who indeed are the queens of country: no-nonsense Loretta Lynn, crossover superstar Patsy Cline and genius songwriter Dolly Parton. Lynn's tunes are almost exclusively religious in nature and Cline always struck me as more reserved on camera than I expect. (You just know she was a blast offstage.) But Parton's winning personality and delightful voice are charming in any context. Her tunes come from her short-lived variety show Dolly from the 70s and if anyone can explain how the numerous attempts to launch a variety show starring Dolly Parton all failed, they're smarter than me. It STILL seems like a can't miss idea to me.

Other music DVDs just out include *John Lennon & The Plastic Ono Live In Toronto '69* (\$14.98; Shout), which is oversold as "the second most important concert" in rock history but is a valued document for Lennon fans of his desire to stretch just as the Beatles were imploding (and personally, I love Yoko Ono's work, even if Eric Clapton clearly didn't); and a trilogy of punk and reggae documentaries about the music scene in the UK that are bursting with raw performances by seemingly everyone: the Clash, Madness, the Jam, Boomtown Rats, the Specials, the Pretenders, Steel Pulse and more. Nothing remarkable on a technical level and the interviews are just filler, but filmmaker Wolfgang Buld was in the right place at the right time and made the most of it. *Punk In London* and *Punk In England* are both \$19.95 from MVDVisual and run from 90 to 107 minutes while *Reggae in Babylon* is slightly cheaper (\$16.95) and only 45 minutes. All three should be bundled together for \$24.95, frankly.

**THE NORMAN LEAR COLLECTION** (\$159.95; Sony) -- Everything we watch on TV today -- certainly every sitcom and many dramas -- has been influenced by the remarkable career of producer Norman Lear, who held sway in the Seventies both commercially and creatively the way few TV talents ever have before or since. This appropriately massive boxed set collects the entire first seasons of his biggest hits: *All In The Family*, *Good Times*, *Maude*, *The Jeffersons*, *Mary Hartman Mary Hartman*, *One Day At A Time* and *Sanford And Son*. Socially provocative, ground-breaking but above all funny, his shows can still take your breath away today with their audacity. *All in the Family* is the standard bearer, of course. But *Mary Hartman* broke ground by being a syndicated hit, *Good Times* was one of the first shows that captured the black experience in America from their perspective (white America could watch it but this was *their* show) and even the innocuous *One Day At A Time* was about a divorced mom when just a few years earlier even the idea that Mary Tyler Moore could be divorced freaked the network out. The best part of the set are the substantial new documentaries that profile Lear and make clear his important role in TV history. So it's no fun to state that this expensive, coffee book table tome makes no sense. Anyone who loves these shows will want more than one season of them and probably already has them. So are people supposed to buy them all over again just to honor Lear? There is literally no audience for this set that I can think of. Even if you haven't bought numerous seasons of your favorite show, you couldn't begin with these because they don't match the boxed sets of the seasons for sale on their own. So this brings me to a pet peeve of mine: I love how so many shows are available in complete seasons, but studios really need to make available a substantial greatest hits for their sitcoms and dramas as well. *I Love Lucy* deserves a two or three DVD set that contains its 20 greatest shows. So does *All in the Family* and *Maude* and *Cheers* and *The Cosby Show* and many other series I could name. Sure, it's great to watch them all in order, but most people won't want to do that with most shows and three episodes on a disc doesn't cut it. A 20 episode collection of *Maude* could wake people up a new generation to the talents of Bea Arthur, for example. So all hail Norman Lear and get smart like him and start packaging TV shows into attractive, price-friendly greatest hits sets.

**ENCHANTED APRIL** (\$29.99; Miramax) -- The novel it's based on has a modest charm and the movie itself didn't make my best of the year list for 1992. But there's no denying the appeal of this gentle comedy about four disparate women who spend the spring in Italy at a rented villa. A marvelous cast helps, of course, and this one includes Joan Plowright, Miranda Richardson, Polly Walker, Alfred Molina and Jim Broadbent. It's not a patch on the similarly themed *A Room With A*

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View (one of the all time greats) but it's a little acknowledged fact that pleasant little movies often endure better than edgier, bolder fare that gets over-praised on first view and rarely watched again. *Enchanted April* is a prime example.

**JEEVES & WOOSTER: THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$59.95; A&E) -- This nicely compact collection of all four seasons of the PG Wodehouse characters (a nincompoop of a blueblood with oodles of money and his man servant) has been out for a few weeks but I've just gotten around to it. That's the beauty of a classic: you don't have to go see it the opening weekend the way you would with, say, *Transformers: Revenge Of The Fallen* to enjoy it. It's always there for you, waiting. I suppose if you've never seen this British comic series you might want to rent the first season. But you'll soon find it irresistible and want to enjoy the entire set so you can watch it again and again. Hugh Laurie is now world famous as the cranky doctor *House*, so it's a shock to see how wonderfully dippy he can be. And co-star Stephen Fry as the unflappable Jeeves is officially a National Treasure in the UK. This series is one key reason why.

**BEAU GESTE** (\$19.98; Universal) -- This Gary Cooper adventure is a faithful retelling of the oft-told story of brothers serving in the French Foreign Legion. It might be remembered more fondly if it hadn't come out in 1939, the greatest year for movies in Hollywood history and thus being overshadowed in our memories by out and out classics like *Stagecoach* and *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*. It's one of four not-bad movies out on Universal for \$19.98. The other three are the flimsy fantasy *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1944), Fred MacMurray and Henry Fonda in the outdoors melodrama *The Trail Of The Lonesome Pine* (1936) and oddball entry *Lonely Are The Brave* from 1962 with Kirk Douglas as an escaped con.

**GARRISON KEILLOR: THE MAN ON THE RADIO IN THE RED SHOES** (\$26.95; Docurama) -- This modest documentary accomplishes what Robert Altman's over-praised last film *A Prairie Home Companion* (2006) could not: it gives us a glimpse into the making of Keillor's beloved radio show and thus a glimpse into the private Keillor himself. One thing is clear: with the hoopla surrounding the wildly popular show having receded with time -- to his suspension of the show for a few years -- Keillor looks pleased as punch to be doing what he loves. Is there any medium like radio for letting someone remain both out of the spotlight and yet at the center of attention. I don't think so.

**PEANUTS 1960S COLLECTION** (\$29.98; Warner Bros.) -- They've been packaged and repackaged time and time again but if for some reason you DON'T own any of the Peanuts TV specials, certainly the six shows from the 1960s are the most beloved with of course *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and *It's The Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* being the only two you really need. The new obligatory extra here is a piece on composer Vince Guaraldi.

**NEW YORK YANKEES PERFECT GAMES AND NO HITTERS** (\$49.95; A&E) -- As the Yankee season looks iffy to me (we may get to the post-season but we don't have the pitching to prevail), I can take comfort in some of the best Yankee pitching of all time. The poor Mets don't even have a no-hitter yet while the Yankees need an entire boxed set to contain their three perfect games and three no-hitters and it doesn't even contain ALL of the no-hitters. I was at the David Wells perfect game (it was Beanie Baby Day at the stadium and I had to sit in the left-field bleachers), but sadly you won't catch a glimpse of me during the game. I was on the street and headed to the David Cone no-hitter but my dad and my brother Chris out-voted me and my brother David because they were in no mood to sit in the drizzling rain. I've forgiven them, sort of. But the greatest pitching performance of all time has to be Don Larsen's perfect game IN THE WORLD SERIES. It still boggles my mind that such a thing could happen. You get six complete games and the Larsen DVD even includes the entire radio broadcast by Bob Wolff. Since the TV broadcast begins in the middle of the second inning, that makes the radio broadcast all the more welcome. But frankly, it's a treat on its own. I would listen to the entire game that way and not even bother with the scratchy old video that's available.

**THE TRANSFORMERS: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON 25TH ANNIVERSARY** (\$29.99; Shout) -- A beautifully packaged collection of the mechanical superheroes and supervillains who battle it out for supremacy using Earth as their ThunderDome. If it'll help me figure out which robot is which in the nonsensical movies, then I'm glad to have it in hand. The series looks spiffy and extras include commercials for the toys and a short about the Transformers phenomenon.

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It must be said that even though Bonnie Franklin's One Day At A Time character is almost always cited as television's first divorced single mom, I'm pretty sure tv's first divorced single mom was Vivian Vance's Vivian Bagley on The Lucy Show.

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I can't find any earlier divorced person as a regular on TV than Vance's. Thanks for the info.

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