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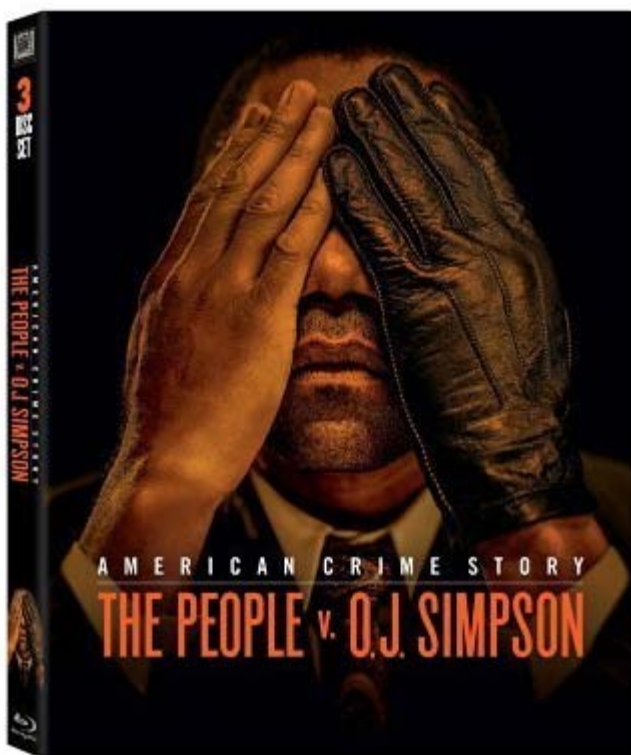


Michael Giltz, ContributorBookFilter creator

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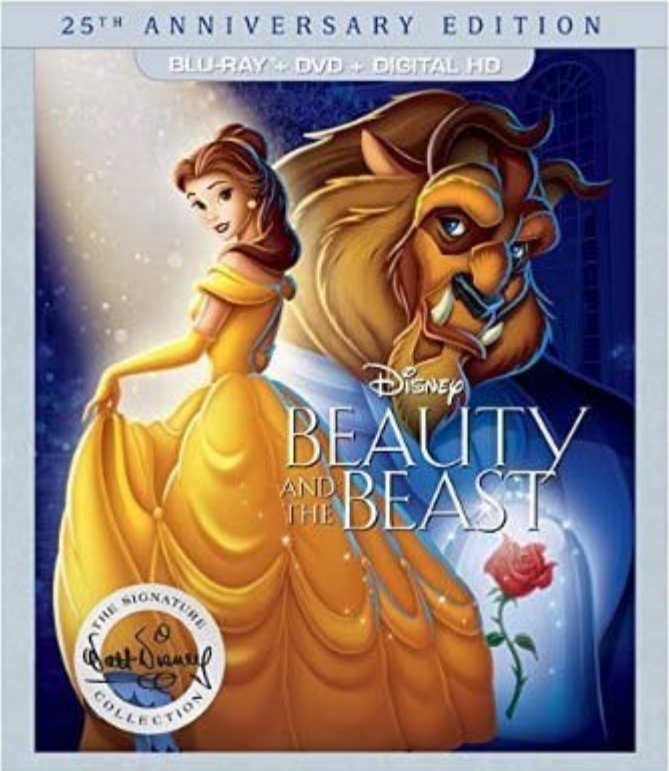
TV shows with the scope of movies, movies that play more like the latest episode of a series than a movie, a classic animated film that turns 25 (which automatically makes you feel really, really old) and the greatest year in movie history. All part of a new week in DVD/BluRay releases. Let's go!

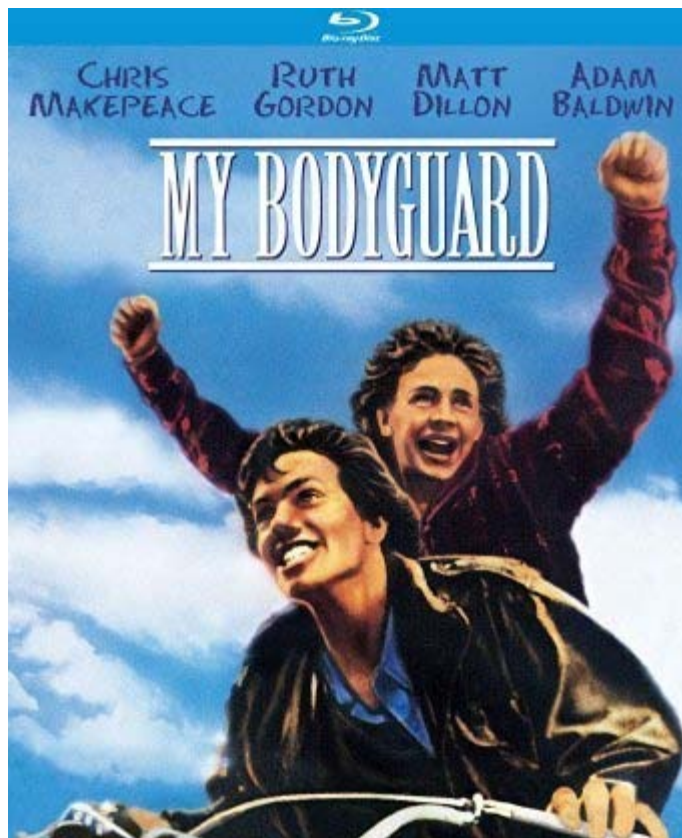
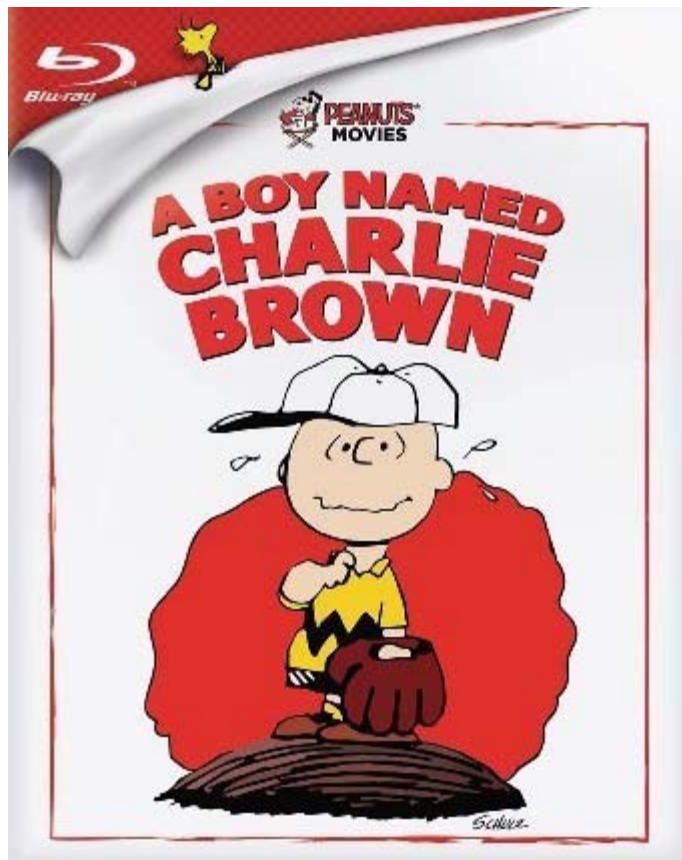


AMERICAN CRIME STORY: THE PEOPLE V O.J. SIMPSON (\$49.99 BluRay; 20th Century Fox)

Is it just me? Or is one of the most acclaimed TV events of the year deeply unsatisfying? Sometimes, when

you go to live theater, a friend will say that none of the actors seemed like they were in the same play. (Blame the director.) This one performed as if it were intense drama, that one like it was a sketch on SNL and the other like they might break into song at any moment. It's an unevenness in tone that this sort of reaction is keying in on. That unevenness is there in spades with this docudrama about the OJ Simpson trial. John Travolta is in his own world, but that's just the most extreme example of a cast that is quite good...but quite good in very different ways almost scene to scene. And it just doesn't work. The ESPN documentary about OJ's career is far more compelling than this oddball enterprise. But don't listen to me — everyone loved it and you might too. Maybe it helps if you were obsessed with the case? I saved about a year of my life for other things by ignoring it as much as possible.





BEAUTY AND THE BEAST 25TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Walt Disney Studios)

A BOY NAMED CHARLIE BROWN (\$24.99 BluRay; Paramount)

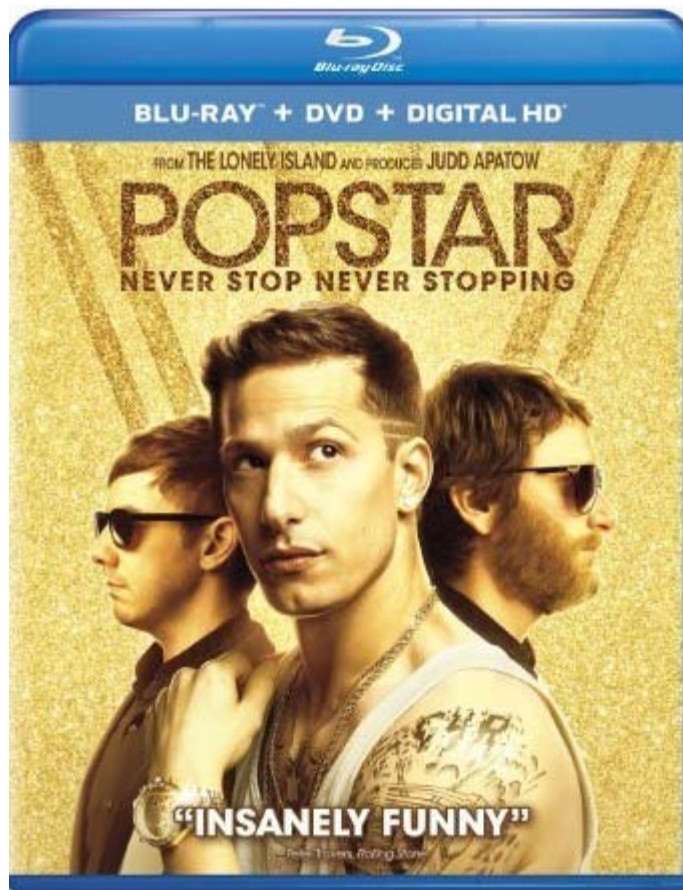
MY BODYGUARD (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

Disney's triumph — and the first animated film to be nominated for Best Picture — turns 25. One wouldn't think they could tease out any more beauty from this frequently repackaged gem. And indeed, if you have a recent edition you certainly don't need to buy *Beauty and the Beast* again. But if it's not in your library or you bought it on DVD many years ago, it's time for an upgrade. This remains one of the best original scores for a movie musical in history, the story moves along with brisk humor, the animation and character drawing hits the sweet spot between classic hand-drawn and the flexibility of computers...and that rushed finale at the end doesn't seem as much of a (minor) flaw as it did in years gone past. I don't hold a grudge against the worthy film *The Silence Of The Lambs* (the only other deserving nominee), but it's a shame what might have been the first Best Picture cartoon was beaten out by the first Best Picture horror movie. It's even more of a shame that the many worthy movies that came in its wake like *Toy Story 1 and 2 and 3* and *Spirited Away* and *The Incredibles* haven't won either.

Less acclaimed but still fondly remembered is *A Boy Named Charlie Brown*. It has some clunky tunes by Rod McKuen, but it also has two winners by him *and* a great score by Vince Guaraldi and the right balance of whimsy and pathos. Frankly, the vibe of the comic strip *Peanuts* works far better as a 22 minute TV special, not drawn out to feature film length. (Ditto virtually every picture book ever written, the exception being *Where The Wild Things Are*. Yet this first time they kind of pulled it off. The follow-up *Snoopy, Come Home?* Not so much.

Keeping with the theme of growing up that *Peanuts* captured so well, the sleeper hit *My Bodyguard* is an enduring charmer about bullying and friendship and, you know, life. Full credit to casting director Vic Ramos, who peopled even small roles with the likes of Jennifer Beals, Martin Mull and Joan Cusack...and that doesn't even include the young newcomers Matt Dillon, Chris Makepeace and Adam Baldwin as the misfit teens who bounce off one another. Ramos also did the first *Star Wars* (they batted a 1.000 on that one) and *Apocalypse Now* and *Blue Lagoon* to name a few before opening his own casting agency a year after *My Bodyguard* came out. Directors always get the credit for good casting but I imagine quite a few actors know the key role Ramos played in their careers.





MARVEL'S CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR (\$32.99 BluRay; Walt Disney Studios)

NOW YOU SEE ME 2 (\$39.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

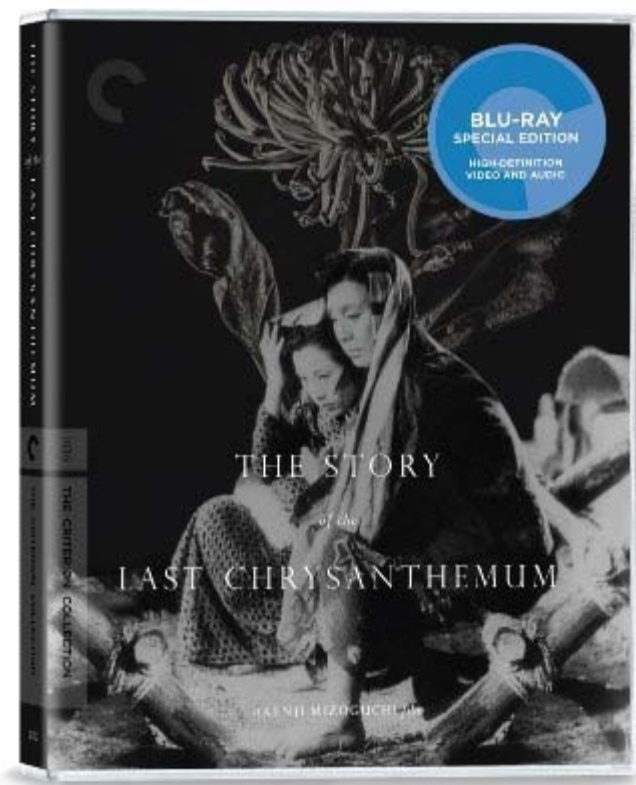
POPSTAR: NEVER STOP NEVER STOPPING (\$34.98 BluRay; \$34.98 Universal Studios Home Entertainment)

Captain America: Civil War is not a movie like we usually think of movies. It's more like those weekly serials that appeared before the main feature, quickie shorts that ended with cliffhangers to keep you coming back. Or it's like the latest episode in an on-going TV series. That's the only way to explain why the very erratic quality of Marvel movies isn't paying a price at the box office. You may not be thrilled with this or that episode of *Game Of Thrones*, but it won't stop you from watching. The same is happening with Marvel movies (and Star Wars and Harry Potter and numerous other examples). Ironically, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* was the best Marvel movie and I dreamt it would get even better. But now my hopes for a truly great film in the Marvel Universe peopled by Disney (the Tobey Maguire *Spider-Man* was great, but that's a different world) are dashed again. This is an *Avengers* movie in all but name and like the most recent *Avengers*, it's chaotic, messy and well-acted but only fitfully fun. No dice.

On the other hand, *Now You See Me 2* plays like an old fashioned sequel. That's not a compliment. They made a nifty little movie about magicians pulling off a heist with their particular skills, all in the service of

justice. It had a better than good cast (hey there, admirably multi-hyphenated Jesse Eisenberg), appealed to adults and became a worldwide hit. Without any compelling reason other than box office, they churned out a sequel. The original didn't beg for a sequel, they didn't have a script that justified the sequel, but they made it anyway. And like the sequels Hollywood used to make, instead of equaling or bettering the first hit (like Marvel has done), this made about two-thirds of what *Now You See Me* made, good enough for the accountants but retroactively diminishing the modest little credit of the original. As the scribes at Box Office Prophet put it, they didn't even have the wit to call the sequel *Now You Don't*.

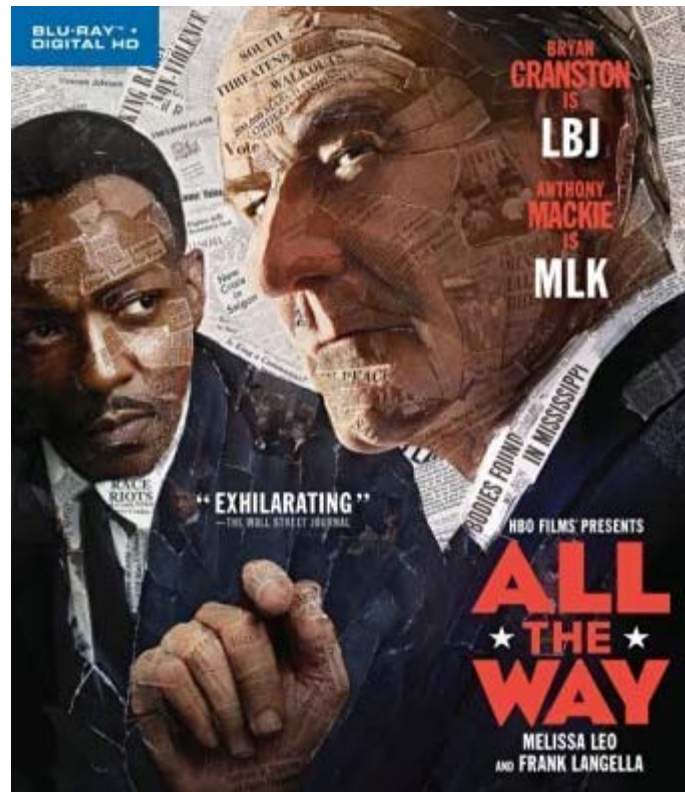
Don't look for a sequel to *Popstar*, Andy Samberg's spoof on a Justin Bieber-like teen idol gone to seed. His *Brooklyn Nine Nine* is a real slow burner of a sitcom in a good way and Samberg has goofy charm to spare. I think he COULD click in the right movie; he just hasn't done so yet. The lazy take on *Popstar* is that it's an *SNL* sketch (at best) that's been unimaginatively drawn out to feature film length. But hey, the movie seems lazy so why bother with some meta-analysis? It's an *SNL* sketch (at best) that's been unimaginatively drawn out to feature film length. But Samberg remains a movie star in search of the right vehicle. I think perhaps he should pester others for good supporting turns in better movies rather than churning out his own projects.

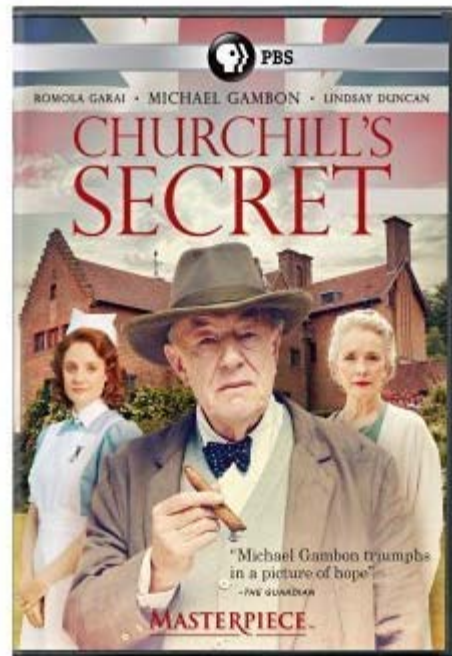


THE STORY OF THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUM (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion Collection)

Did you know 1939 was the greatest year in movie history? Specifically, it's often cited as the peak of the Hollywood studio system. If you're wondering why, check out the movies nominated for Best Picture in 1939: it's a Murderer's Row of masterpieces like *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*, *Stagecoach*, *The Wizard Of Oz*, *Love*

Affair and Best Picture winner *Gone With The Wind* (which is not a masterpiece, but that's a story for another day). You could fill a film festival just with the great movies not nominated in 1939: *Gunga Din*, *The Hound Of The Baskervilles*, *The Women* and the gem *Midnight*, to name a few. Yet Hollywood is just the tip of the iceberg, with great British and French and Japanese films also being released in 1939 in their home countries, such as *Rules Of The Game* (a release stymied by the Nazis) and *The Story Of The Last Chrysanthemum*. This masterpiece by Kenji Mizoguchi is one of the great backstage melodramas, telling the tale of the son of a great actor who hams his way through performance, humored by cast-members who don't want to annoy the young man's powerful father. Only a beautiful female servant will gently tell the truth. She's fired, he chases after her, they fall in love (of course) and he becomes determined to really turn himself into a major talent. That's why I've devoted myself to seeing every single film from 1939 that crosses my path; if it's the best year in movie history, why not watch every single one of them? Criterion presents a lovely print with their usual care; pair this one with *Topsy Turvy* or any number of films besotted with the stage.







ALL THE WAY (\$19.98 BluRay; HBO Home Video)

THE MEASURE OF A MAN \$34.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

MASTERPIECE: CHURCHILL'S SECRET (\$34.99 DVD)

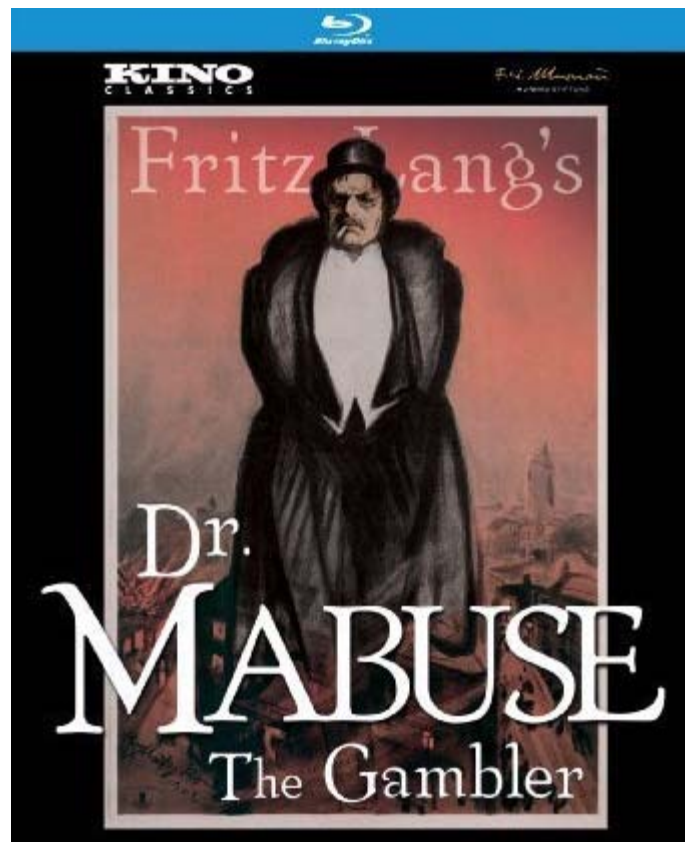
ALIENS 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (\$24.99 BluRay; 20th Century Fox)

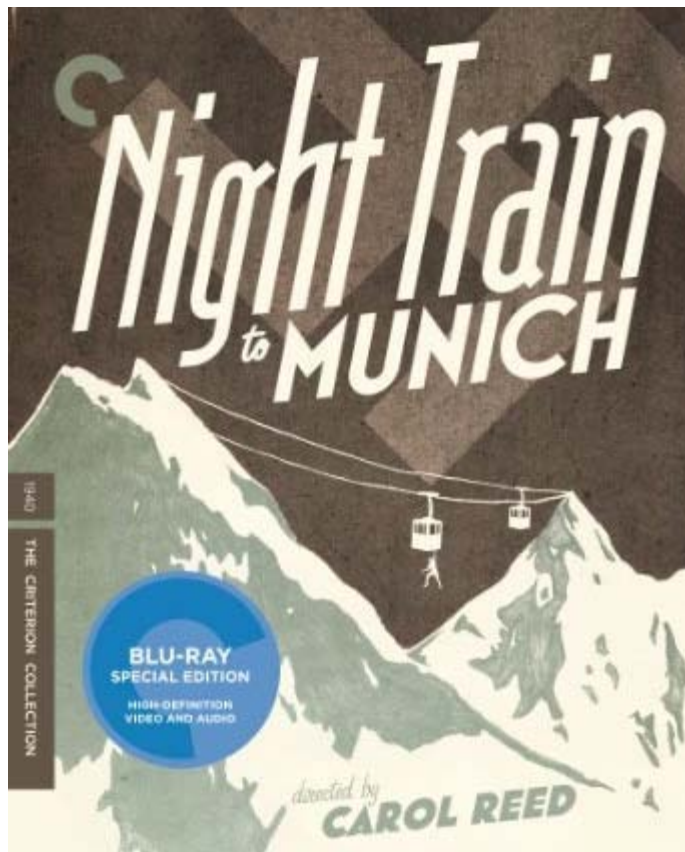
Great acting is at the heart of these four releases. *All The Way* was a rousingly fun play on Broadway about LBJ hustling to pass a major piece of Civil Rights legislation. Bryan Cranston was marvelous in the role of President Johnson. I had reservations about the play being turned into a movie, however, since it was a bit didactic and the heavy-handedness of some passages would become more obvious on film than they were onstage. And that's precisely what happened. Hey, the play was over-praised (it was solid entertainment and a great showcase but not a great play). Seeing it on film where the chewiness of Cranston must necessarily be toned down takes all the juice out of it.

The Measure Of A Man is a triumph for journeyman actor Vincent London. Plus this drama is so very timely in its capturing of an unemployed man's desperate humiliation while trying to find work. It's of the moment in its story and timeless in its acting and when you combine that with London's deep respect by his peers it's no wonder the movie is a career capper for him. It could be a dark horse for the Best Actor Oscars but I think that ship sailed for many reasons, unfortunately. Watch the movie and you'll learn how unfair that is to London.

Michael Gambon aka The Great Gambon doesn't need a career capper. He's been capping his career almost from the start with one great performance after another. (Usually on stage though often on TV and film as well.) Here in *Churchill's Secret* he plays the great man hiding the effects of strokes from the public. It's the lion in winter played by a lion in winter who still has bite. This isn't a masterpiece, even if it did air on *Masterpiece*, but as always Gambon makes you believe it could be.

Sigourney Weaver's performance was so good in *Aliens* she got nominated for Best Actress (losing out to Marlee Matlin in *Children Of A Lesser God*). That's no small feat, since *Aliens* was an action film, a sci-fi movie and a sequel to boot. But she is so utterly winning and so good at physically embodying the role and everything Ripley is going through that like Harrison Ford in *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, she set new standards for what the genre could produce. And given the demands of delivering this performance against mostly blue screens rather than an actor (YOU try emoting opposite a tennis ball), it's all the more amazing. This BluRay is similar to recent editions along with some new stuff — essential if you don't own it, but not if you've purchased it in the last few years.





DR. MABUSE: THE GAMBLER (\$39.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

ROAD HOUSE (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

NIGHT TRAIN TO MUNICH (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion Collection)

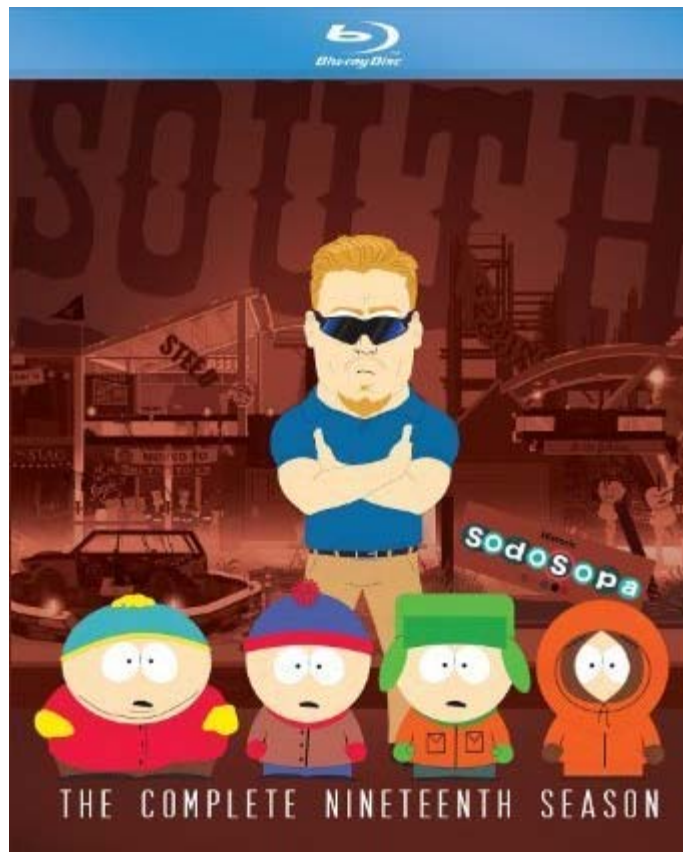
We're being positively deluged with early works by director Fritz Lang lately and what a treat. If you think James Bond wrote the book on spies and exotic thrills, check out the silent crime thriller *Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler*. It has far-flung locations, beautiful women, stunts and a villain worth hissing at, played by Rudolf Klein-Rogge with relish. This is the two part edition, not the truncated all-in-one version and worth every cliffhanger. Pure pleasure in a print that's likely superior to what most people saw back in 1922! Lang returned to this iconic baddie a decade later and again in 1960 but he never topped this.

Speaking of crime dramas, here's a noir to brighten up your day. Ida Lupino stars in 1948's *Road House* as a gal who falls for the owner of a road house...and then falls harder for the manager. Trouble ensues. You could toss out all of Lupino's acting and she's still have a major career, given her work as a director and writer in movies and TV (not to mention books and more). But she's a compelling, hard-boiled cookie perfect for noir. Here she even introduces the saloon classic "One For My Baby (And One More For The Road)."

On a lighter note, there's the nifty thrills of *Night Train To Munich*, the 1940 vehicle in which an inventor and his daughter are kidnapped by the Nazis and our hero has to kidnap them back. It's directed by Carol Reed, so no wonder this one gets passed over a bit. That same year he made the marvelous mining/union film *The Stars Look Down*. Not helping matters, *Night Train To Munich* was foolishly linked in its marketing campaign to the very similar and superior Hitchcock entertainment *The Lady Vanishes*. Put all that aside and it's an amusing romp, made with Reed's growing command of cinema that would peak at the end of the 1940s with his three masterpieces: *Odd Man Out*, *Fallen Idol* and *The Third Man*.







EMPIRE SEASON TWO (\$39.98 DVD; 20th Century Fox)

THE FLASH COMPLETE SECOND SEASON (\$54.97 BluRay; Warner Home Video)

SUPERNATURAL COMPLETE ELEVENTH SEASON (\$54.97 BluRay; Warner Home Video)

SCORPION SEASON TWO (\$55.98 DVD; Paramount)

SOUTH PARK COMPLETE NINETEENTH SEASON (\$42.99 BluRay; Comedy Central)

THE BIG BANG THEORY SEASON COMPLETE NINTH SEASON (\$49.99 BluRay; Warner Home Video)

There is SO MUCH TV that we're literally drowning in it. I've included these six sets but I've ignored easily six more while doing so. As for *Empire*, Lee Daniels was absolutely right. The first season was 12 episodes long and aired in the winter. He knew a melodrama like this could burn itself out quickly — you can only offer up so many plot twists before things become ridiculous. There's a reason telenovelas last one year, you know. Daniels said, hey, let's not rush the new season and let's stick to 12 episodes so we don't wear out our welcome. He lost every battle (or at least, money won them) and season two came too soon and too foolishly and it has worn out its welcome faster than a pop song that's sort of catchy but becomes so overplayed you start to hate it.

In contrast, *The Flash* has finished its second season and still feels like it's introducing itself and figuring out what it wants to be. Call me when you've got the answers.

Supernatural just chugs along, sometimes with overly complicated arcs and now pulling back from the brink to focus on monsters of the week until the grand finale is finally in sight. I mean, it does have to end some day, doesn't it?

Unlike *The Flash*, *Scorpion* has known exactly what it is from day one: a CBS procedural light on the season-long arcs and heavy on wit and a *MacGyver*-like pretense of smarts. You may not have learned something while watching these misfit geniuses defeat the bad guys but you FEEL like you've learned something. And no, you can't escape from prison with just a rubber band and a piece of gum, *MacGyver* or no *MacGyver*.

South Park is the stealth classic, a TV series that really found its mojo about six or seven seasons after starting and keeps chugging along but astonishes you with its continual edge. Unlike Lee Daniels on *Empire*, they were a pretty huge hit from the start but that led their network to actually AGREE with their creative requests. They make the short seasons they want and make them when they want and deliver them as soon as possible after crafting them and it all works brilliantly. It's like the artisanal beer of sitcoms, if artisanal beer had a potty mouth and a wicked sense of satire. These guys might have absconded to the movies or Broadway ages ago but it's our luck they recognize that *South Park* is the perfect platform for their offbeat sensibility. Episodes and seasons may vary in quality a tad, but the bar is very very high. Still, I wouldn't mind another movie musical.... Just saying.

And who am I to say the folks at *The Big Bang Theory* should have called it a day years ago? That's pretty rich since I found this broad comedy filled with a seemingly endless series of nerdy pop culture references pretty

unassuming from the start. The cast elevated it for a while but no live action sitcom ever got better or had any reason for being beyond season seven. (That's when *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* called it a day, if you're wondering why I said "seven.") So yeah, they should have walked into the sunset years ago but since this was always a monster in the ratings that has made everyone absurdly rich and entertains fans even today, I suppose they can keep on making them forever. If you don't want to watch, you don't have to...unless you're at my brother's in which case the show seems to be on a permanent loop (when Amy Schumer isn't on) so the *Star Trek* gags really start to wear thin and make you resentful, but that's not THEIR fault.

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