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Posted: December 16, 2010 04:42 AM

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DVDs: Peanuts and Other New Holiday Titles

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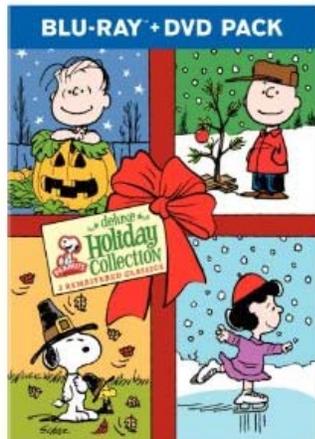
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Okay, you already own *It's A Wonderful Life* and *A Christmas Story* and some Rankin Bass. But maybe you need a new title or two to spruce up your holiday DVD collection. Here are some recent releases to consider:



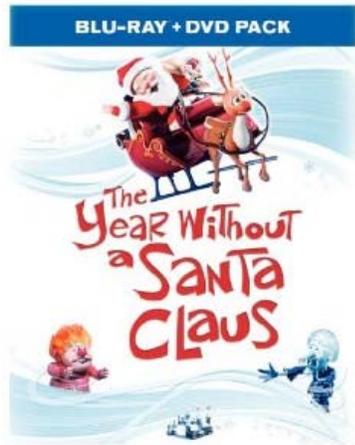
PEANUTS HOLIDAY COLLECTION (\$42.98 BluRay or \$39.98 regular; Warner Bros.) -- Okay, if

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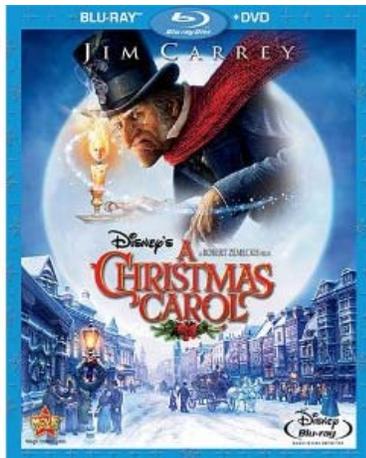
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you own any TV specials at all you probably own one of the previous DVD collections that features the classic *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. But the myriad Peanuts specials have been packaged and repackaged so many times it's impossible to keep track of them all. So what's the draw here? Well, BluRay of course, not to mention a deluxe version with a snowglobe and some other doodads. The prints have always been taken care of by Warner Bros., so the improvement of these very old TV shows isn't dramatic, but they do look good. The sale price of the BluRay edition costs almost TWICE as much as the regular DVDs, which is ridiculous. After all these years, just give us one definitive set of every Peanuts special ever made and be done with it. If money is no object and for some reason you don't already own that Peanuts classic, this set contains it and *It's The Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* (their other major classic), *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* and three bonus specials.



THE YEAR WITHOUT A SANTA CLAUS (\$24.98; Warner Bros.) -- One of the best Rankin/Bass specials, you wouldn't know it by the packaging but this set also contains the so-so *Nestor, The Long-Eared Christmas Donkey* and *Rudolph's Shiny New Year*. Add in some extras and you've got about two hours of entertainment. Of course, if your kids aren't around you'll just jump to "Heat Miser" and sing along. BluRay looks better but not dramatically so; no surprise on such old titles made for TV.



A CHRISTMAS CAROL (\$39.99; Disney) -- I'm still not down with director Robert Zemeckis and his modern spin on rotoscoping -- live actors do a scene and then it gets animated. As with his earlier film *The Polar Express*, the animated characters seem stiff and a little dead in the eyes. The work is improved but still not ready for prime time. However, overlooked in the technological boundary-pushing is the fact that Jim Carrey gives one of his best performances in years as Scrooge. His work is subtle, funny, menacing and real. Too bad it's hidden in a film that thinks the timeless classic by Charles Dickens needs jazzing up by shrinking down Scrooge and send him rocketing down streets or up into the night sky. Absurd.

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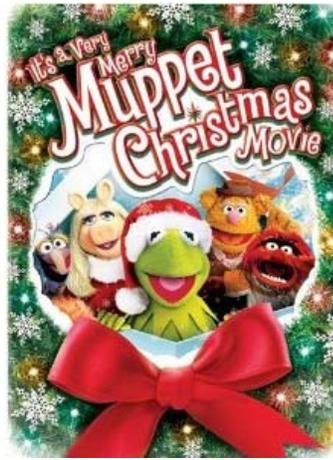


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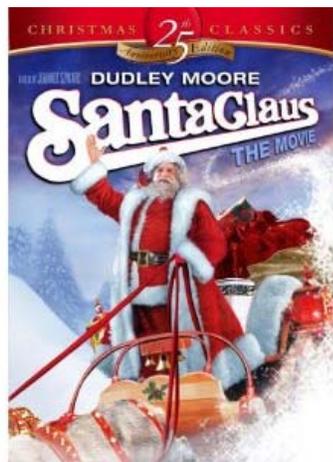
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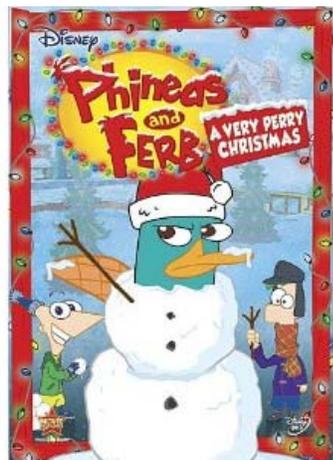
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IT'S A VERY MERRY MUPPET CHRISTMAS (\$14.98; Universal) -- A Muppet spin on It's A Wonderful Life with Kermit finding out that indeed the world would have been worse off if he had never been a little tadpole, not better. The draw here for this so-so Muppet entry is a nine song CD with the gang caroling through holiday standards like "Deck The Halls."



SANTA CLAUS: THE MOVIE (\$14.98; Lionsgate) -- A stodgy precursor to the Will Ferrell comedy Elf (which is quite good), Santa Claus: The Movie fails on several levels. First, a movie about Santa Claus shouldn't spend half the film focusing on an elf, even if the elf is played by Dudley Moore. On the other hand, trying to recapture the magic of Superman: The Movie by replicating the formula of that classic film. Unfortunately, rather than elevating the Superman myth by treating it like an epic, almost Christ-like origin story, doing the same with Santa Claus just seems tiresome and vaguely absurd. Still with me? Probably not. And the movie doesn't hold your attention any better.



PHINEAS AND FERB: A VERY PERRY CHRISTMAS (\$19.99; Warner Bros.) -- This is a good bargain: you get an amusing P&F Christmas special along with a batch of other episodes and a welcome number of extras like a karaoke function that lets you sing along with Perry, Christmas wish lists for all the characters and more. Cheeky humor with pop cultural references put this in the Looney Tunes vein. The only shame is that fans of the show don't have the option to purchase an entire season of episodes. But kids shows almost always seem to get divvied up into multiple sets for some reason.

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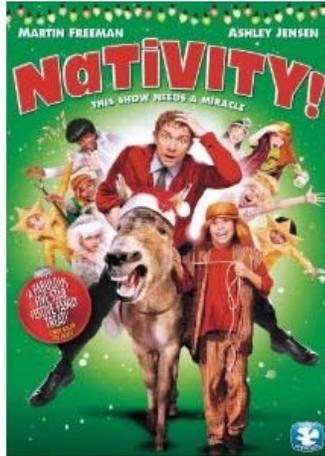
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NATIVITY! (\$14.98; Freestyle) -- Decent family fare that mixes Glee with the holidays by having a hapless high school teacher mount a musical Nativity special. The main draw here is Martin Freeman, charming as always. He's enshrined forever thanks to the UK version of *The Office*, but when you toss in the current modern spin on Sherlock Holmes (he plays Dr. Watson) and the upcoming film(s) *The Hobbit*, with Freeman as Bilbo Baggins, and you've got a genuine pop culture icon in the making. This doesn't spruce up his resume but it's no embarrassment either.

ALSO OUT:

NUTCRACKER SWEET (\$14.98; Lionsgate) -- My little friend Katie Rose absolutely LOVES Angelina Ballerina and she's sure to eat this up when I give it to her. Reviews are meaningless in this context.

MERRY CHRISTMAS, OLIVIA (\$16.99; Paramount) -- I'm a big fan of the Olivia books by Ian Falconer but still can't quite buy Olivia in this computer-animated version. Still, the holidays bring out the pushy best in Olivia.

TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS (\$19.98; Warner Bros.) -- The magic of Rankin/Bass did not transfer to animation: stop-motion is the format where they shine. Plus, 24 minutes of minor R/B for \$20 is simply far too much.

CHANUKAH: THE MISSING MENORAH (\$14.95; Shalom Sesame) -- Grover's bringing the latkas...but where's the menorah? Given the paucity of Jewish-themed holiday specials, this is especially welcome.

*Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of **Showbiz Sandbox**, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's **available free on iTunes**. Visit **Michael Giltz at his website** and his **daily blog**. Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called **Popsurfing** and also **available for free on iTunes**. Link to him on **Netflix** and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.*

NOTE: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs to consider for review. He typically does not guarantee coverage and invariably receives far more screeners and DVDs than he can cover each week. Also, Michael Giltz freelances as a writer of DVD copy (the text that appears on the back of DVDs) for some titles released by IFC and other subsidiaries of MPI. It helps pay the rent, but does not obligate him in any way to speak positively or negatively of their titles.

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Animals Soccer Tea Party

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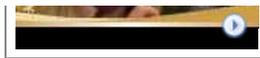
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I tried to watch A Christmas Carol last night, and was struck immediately by how much it reminded me of the animation in Polar Express, which I hated. An animated Colin Firth is not a good thing.

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woodsyzwizz 06:34 PM on 12/17/2010

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Two serious additions, and one silly: "The Road to Christmas" with Jennifer Grey is fun, funny, and touching. It's a kind of Christmas Odyssey that keeps moving and keeps entertaining. "Undercover Christmas" with Jamie Gertz is a simple, enjoyable romp. Tine Daly as the acerbic matriarch keeps the film from becoming too silly. Not yet out on DVD, it plays several times over the holiday season.

When you tire of syrupy Christmas fare, the B-movie "Santa's Slay" ["He's making a list - pray you're not on it!"] is fun after a couple of strong drinks. The reindeer from Hell is played by a white buffalo! Although the plot is limited and the action drags at times, this spoof is a once-a-year treat.

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