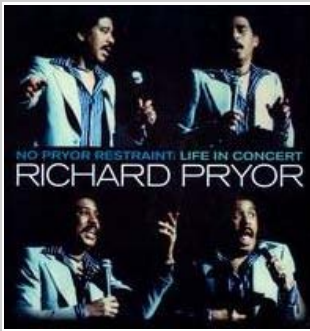


DVDs: Richard Pryor, Bill Cosby, Paul McCartney and More!

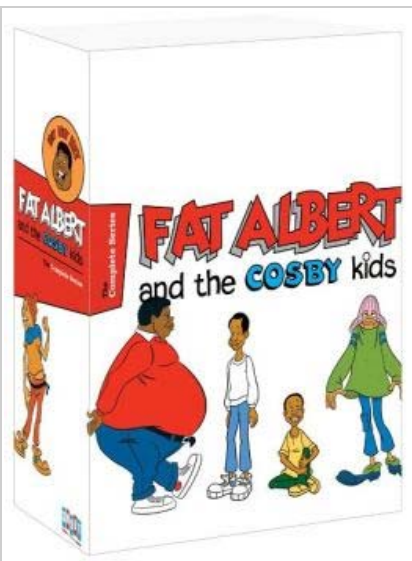
Posted: 06/25/2013 4:43 pm

A host of great boxed sets and rare releases came out on DVD in the last few weeks, from the brilliant Richard Pryor in concert (where he's at his best) to kid-friendly Bill Cosby to Paul McCartney wowing audiences on tour to the best new show on television. Check them out.



NO PRYOR RESTRAINT: LIFE IN CONCERT (\$99.99 CD and DVD; Shout) -- Richard Pryor made some great movies. But he also made a lot of crappy ones, especially later on in his career. So it's good to have this boxed set putting the spotlight back on what he did best: stand-up. You get seven CDs of his best albums along with some two hours of previously unavailable material. You can actually hear Pryor finding his voice and getting bolder and bolder. It's a more distilled version of his greatness that supplants an earlier all-CD set. What makes this new box definitive is the inclusion of his three concert films. Comedy albums are great but for an artist like Pryor who created characters onstage a la Lily Tomlin and

other masters, actually seeing him perform these monologues and tell these stories and bring these people to life (like Mudbone) is essential. You don't need me to tell you he's a genius. Plenty of celebs and fellow comics do that in brief tributes to Pryor. Combine this with Marina Zenovich's acclaimed new documentary about his life -- *Omit The Logic* is airing on Showtime right now -- and you've got a terrific overview of a brilliant, funny man.



FAT ALBERT AND THE COSBY KIDS THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$119.99 DVD; Shout) -

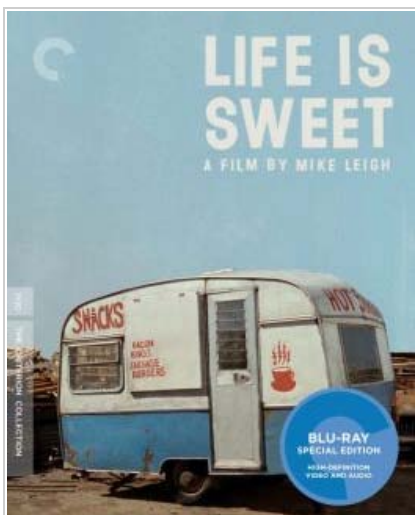
- Bill Cosby is quoted in that Richard Pryor boxed set but he couldn't keep the educator in him quiet -- Cosby felt obliged to grouse that he wished people would be able to separate Pryor's genius from his use of foul language. Sometimes that tendency of Cosby can make him seem a scold. Other times it encouraged him to do groundbreaking work, such as launching the kids' tv series *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*. Launched in 1972, it would appear in several different iterations (usually after a three year rest), finally calling it a day in 1985 after 110 episodes. An essay by Professor Gordon L. Berry included in the very handsome set from Shout makes you feel like you're eating your spinach. And while the show is unquestionably educational in the Sesame Street sense with lessons on lying and the responsibility of owning a pet and so on, it's also funny and sweet and amusing as inner

city kids amuse themselves in a junkyard and around town. It features some low-rent animation but a clever combination of live-action Bill Cosby offering jokes and commentary and the cartoon characters (many of whom he voiced himself) made the series very fresh. And needless to say its cast featuring black kids having fun and mixed in with other shows on Saturday morning was the strongest, albeit subtlest lesson of all. We have so many TV channels now it's easy to segregate ourselves again. Back when this show launched and you only had four or five channels to choose from, I watched *Fat Albert* and *The Jeffersons* and *Sanford & Son* because I thought they were funny and didn't watch *What's Happening* because I didn't think it was funny. And that was the only reason. I didn't realize growing up in South Florida

what that meant but Bill Cosby did and knew how and why he wanted this show to be on the air each weekend. Hearing Fat Albert say "Hey hey hey" in virtually almost every sentence gets old very quickly but it's amazing how vividly I remember some of these episodes. Nostalgic adults and very young kids might still enjoy it but there's no question it's a landmark show that deserves this set.



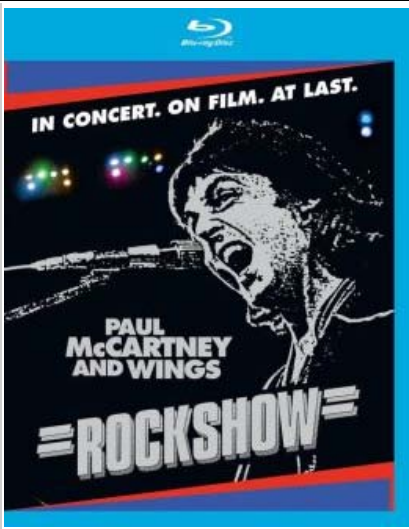
3:10
TO



YUMA (\$39.99 BluRay; Criterion)
JUBAL (\$29.99 BluRay; Criterion)
LIFE IS SWEET (\$39.99 BluRay; Criterion) --
 When movie buffs make lists of the best films of all time, they're sure to include a few westerns like the usual suspects: *The Searchers*, *Red River*, *Stagecoach*, *High Noon*, one of those Spaghetti westerns and so on. But they don't always think of *3:10 To Yuma*. They should. It's as trim and mean and beautifully acted and tense as any of those others. The more I see it, the more I love it. And the more I appreciate the great Glenn Ford, the charismatic bad guy who cajoles and teases and worries the usually bland Van Heflin into the performance of his career. I hope you didn't watch the remake and never do; this is the real deal. Criterion does its usual impressive job of delivering a great print and some key extras though this lean masterpiece doesn't need any.

In contrast, I've been completely unaware of *Jubal*, which sets Othello in the West to mixed results. It's a curiosity, with Ernest Borgnine as the unsuspecting ranch owner, Valerie French as his bored wife, Ford as the cattleman any woman would be attracted to and Rod Steiger as the trouble-making lingo who poisons the well for everyone. Delmer Daves directed and I'm glad I saw it, though I'm not sure it deserves the imprimatur of being part of Criterion.

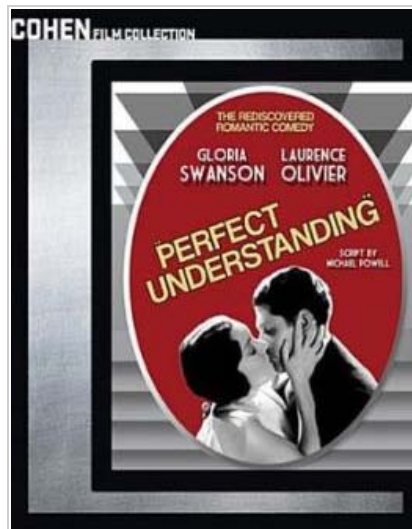
There's no question that *Life Is Sweet* is a masterpiece, a bleakly funny drama about working class parents (hilarious Jim Broadbent and Alison Steadman) trying to raise (or rather, not paying terribly much attention to) their twins. Director Mike Leigh is a master and this might be the best introduction to his particular gifts of creating an utterly believable world. The extras here really are a treat. Leigh is a miserable sod who treats interviews with about as much civility as a hostile interrogation. But here he is talking about the film in an audio commentary, heard in a not too prickly interview from 1991 and best of all we get five short films by Leigh. A modern classic.



**PAUL MCCARTNEY AND WINGS:
ROCKSHOW** (\$34.99 BluRay; EagleVision)
STEVE EARLE: THE WARNER BROS.

YEARS (\$54.99 CDs and DVD; Shout/Rhino/Warner Bros.) -- Rockshow captures Paul McCartney at a particularly ebullient moment in his long, storied and still creatively exciting career. Massive stadium tours were still very much a novelty in 1976 and being able to hear McCartney actually perform from the Beatles catalog was a new thrill. This two hour and ten minute concert features 30 songs and Paul is in wonderful voice throughout. It's not brilliantly shot but happily concert films hadn't as yet developed the ADD that makes so many newer ones involve nothing but furious editing with twenty or thirty or forty cuts during each number. Here the camera actually pauses and captures a moment. Wings is not a great band but the songs and the audience's delight and Paul's showmanship lift this up a great deal. If you're a Beatles fan like me, this is unmissable. Though I'm still waiting for *Let It Be*.

Steve Earle is also still creating great music. It's a surprise to me he only made three albums for Warner Bros. after getting out of jail and straightening his life around (drugs, of course). This boxed set contains three great albums -- *Train A Comin'*, *I Feel Alright*, *El Corazon* -- and it's a credit to his talent and productivity that the next one (a bluegrass album with the Del McCoury Band) is even better. That's saying something. If you're like me, you already own them. The draw here are two concerts: you get a CD of an excellent show from Nashville in 1995 that featured guests like Emmylou Harris and you get a DVD of the MTV special *To Hell And Back* in which Earle completes some of his parole obligations by giving a concert at the Cold Creek Correctional Facility. That's all too brief (the entire special is 45 minutes long) but together they show what a solid live performer he is and the remarkable catalog of songs he can draw upon.



**AT
LONG
LAST
LOVE**

(\$24.99 BluRay; Fox)
PERFECT UNDERSTANDING (\$34.99 BluRay; Cohen Film Collection)
OF HUMAN BONDAGE (\$29.99 BluRay; Kino/Library Of Congress) -- Has there ever been a bootleg version of a major film hiding in plain sight? That's the remarkable story behind this new definitive director's edition of

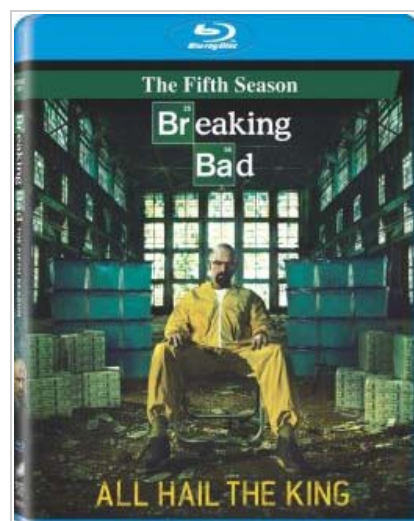
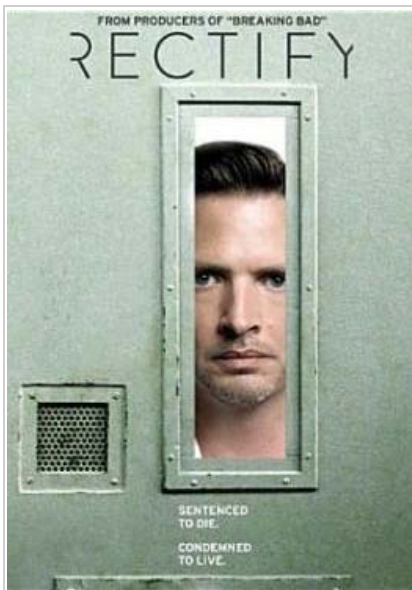


Peter Bogdanovich's musical *At Long Last Love*. His career took off with three masterpieces: *The Last Picture Show*, *Paper Moon* and *What's Up Doc* -- only to be derailed by *Daisy Miller*, *At Long Last Love* and *Nickelodeon*. never to fully recover. He made some good films later but nothing remotely as important as those three gems. But his Cole Porter musical was a sore spot since Bogdanovich felt rushed and didn't have time to edit carefully and create the movie he knew he'd filmed. But again and again over the years he'd hear from fans praising it and wondering why it was so

critically lambasted. When he finally watched the version that had been circulating on TV and cable for years, Bogdanovich was astonished to realize a studio exec had created his own bootleg version of the film that hewed much more closely to Bogdanovich's original vision and which was far superior to the theatrical version that played in theaters and was booed by many critics. The entire tale is told in this column for Indiewire and now that it's out on BluRay we can judge for ourselves afresh if this is an interesting mess, a failure or an unappreciated gem.

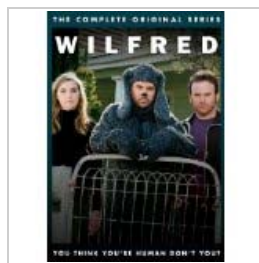
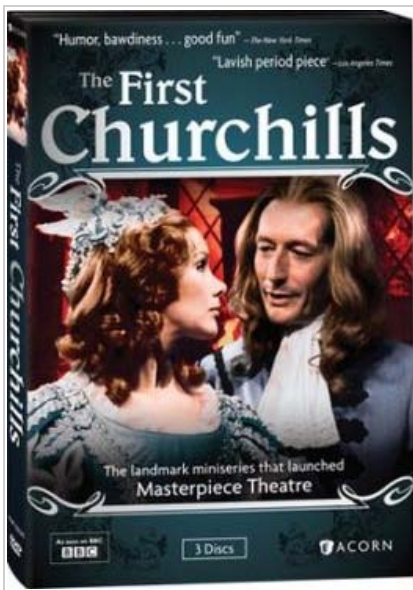
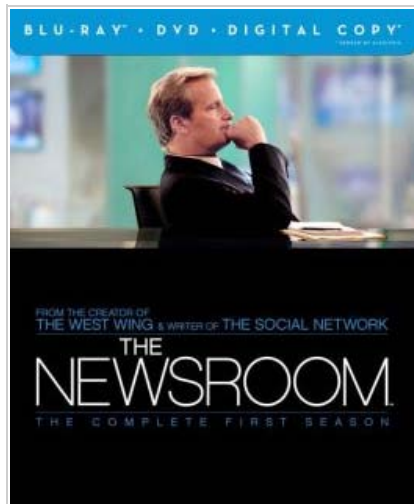
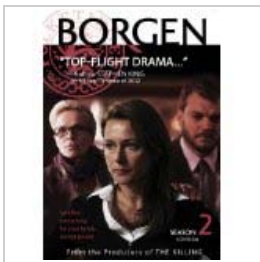
Few would claim greatness for *Perfect Understanding*, but the combination of talent makes this irresistible for movie buffs. You get Gloria Swanson (a great talent now overshadowed by her final Grand Guignol performance in *Sunset Blvd*) along with Laurence Olivier in a romantic comedy scripted by the brilliant Michael Powell. With that pedigree the result is a little disappointing but interesting nonetheless.

Perfect Understanding was the only film Swanson made in Great Britain. Bette Davis didn't travel there to make *Of Human Bondage*. She just went from Warner Bros. where she was under contract to the low-rent RKO. Why they wanted the unknown Davis to play a Cockney waitress who hypnotizes the ever-bland Leslie Howard is beyond understanding. But Davis made the most of her chance, overacting with abandon and setting off fireworks and juggling and doing anything else she could possibly do to say "Look at me!!!!" It worked and she became a star forever. I'll always cherish her melodramatic line reading of disgust when she tells Howard maniacally, "Abnd after you kissed me I always used to wipe my mouth. WIPED my mouth!" Even when going over the top, you can't help watching her.



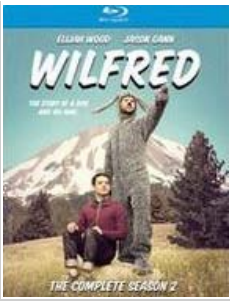


RECTIFY
SEASON ONE
 (\$29.99 DVD;
 Anchor Bay)
BREAKING BAD
THE FIFTH
SEASON (\$65.99
 BluRay; Sony)
HOUSE OF
CARDS
COMPLETE
FIRST SEASON
 (\$65.99 BluRay;
 Sony)
BORGEN
SEASON 2
 (\$49.99 DVD;
 MHZ)
THE NEWSROOM
COMPLETE
FIRST SEASON
 (\$79.99 BluRay;



HBO)
THE FIRST
CHURCHILLS
 (\$59.99 DVD;
 Acorn)
CALL THE
MIDWIFE
SEASON TWO
 (\$39.99 DVD;
 BBC)
WILFRED THE

COMPLETE



ORIGINAL SERIES (\$29.99 DVD; Shout)

WILFRED SEASON TWO (\$39.99 BluRay; Fox) -- The crown of "Best Show On TV" gets passed around like a whiskey bottle at a rodeo. But for a few weeks earlier this year when it aired on Sundance, that crown belonged to *Rectify*. Calling a series the quietest show on television isn't exactly a quote they'll put in an ad campaign, but that's one of the signal pleasures of this drama. It's about Daniel Holden (a great Aden Young) who was put into prison for the brutal murder of his girlfriend and spent the next 19 years facing potential execution, only to be released because DNA evidence now clouds the issue of his guilt. Some people think he's still guilty, others (precious few) think he's innocent or are willing

to move on and the other people involved on that horrible night suddenly realize their actions may come back to haunt them. What's great about these episodes is that this show is not strictly or wholly about whether he's innocent and who really killed his girlfriend. Mostly it's focused on Daniel and how he's trying to adapt to life outside of prison after spending his entire adult life in a brutal, indifferent environment. He's quiet, intelligent and seriously screwed up because that's what prison will do to you. Pacing his small bedroom (following the same path he did when pacing in his cell), making a half-hearted grasp at religion for solace, awkwardly trying to reconnect with family members all provide intense drama. Simply going to a corner store where kids giggle and take his picture with their cell phones is enough to befuddle and unnerve Daniel and that's exactly the sort of drama -- subtle, smart, real -- that *Rectify* is exploring. The cast is generally excellent (with the notable exception that his sister played by Abigail Spencer looks an escaped Victoria's Secret model) and the show serious in its intent to stay right with Daniel and see the world through his eyes. Great stuff.

For years now, *Breaking Bad* has been tagged as not just the best drama on TV but one of the best of all time. It's barreling towards its final episodes just in time. Season Five upset those who hated to see their chemistry teacher become such a brutal thug. Certainly Walter White (Bryan Cranston) is less interesting as a straight-on baddie but that's the entire point of the show. You can't be a drug lord with good intentions. Either you fail and you die or you thrive and become a monster. I'm eager to see the final batch of shows before making up my mind about the overall arc of the series. But what a cast and what a fresh drama it's been.

I'm still not sold on *House Of Cards* starring Kevin Spacey. The American series is still overshadowed in my imagination by the UK original, though I think it's slowly finding its own way. Still, there's no question Netflix has delivered a quality drama any channel would be proud to have on their own. If you didn't binge view when it was launched, now's your chance.

Another notable political drama is *Borgen* from Denmark. Season 1 of this tale of the first female head of that small country took off like a rocket. Unfortunately, it ended with one of the bedrock pleasures of the show -- her warm family life -- being upended in an unconvincing, unexpected divorce. The more real the show remains, the more focused on the day to day business of running the country, the better. When it gets caught up in conspiracies and elaborate plots, it becomes far less interesting. Season two is still good -- the cast led by the very appealing Sidse Babett Knudsen as the Prime Minister and the sexy Pilou Asbaek as her spin doctor -- but it's fascinating to see how the lack of a centered home life throws the heart of the show off a lot. They ended it after season three and you can already see why, though fans will certainly not be disappointed to a great degree.

The Newsroom is a blue chip series with a cow chip reputation at the moment. Creator Aaron Sorkin had the ideal platform with *The West Wing* because the president is *supposed* to use his bully pulpit to expound on the issues of the day. That same sensibility seemed silly on *Sports Night*. He seemed to alight on another great environment for what he does best but somehow *The Newsroom* was too self-satisfied. Sorkin admits there's fixing to be done so maybe Season Two will be better. And I just heard from two friends who defend it strongly, thanks in no small part to the cast led by Jeff Daniels. (You gotta love any show smart enough to cast John Gallagher.) But to me it still feels like homework.

Costume dramas just say PBS to me and the original Masterpiece Theatre blockbuster *The First Churchills* typifies what makes that such a happy combination: you get John Neville and Susan Hampshire in winning form playing the madly in love Sarah Jennings and military genius John Churchill. Toss in decades of British history, royal pageantry and discrete sexual hijinks and most MT buffs will be happy as clams. This is proof they were getting it done right from the start.

I am not so enthusiastic about the latest PBS smash hit *Call The Midwife*. Season Two made clear once and for all that this was not going to blossom into a solid drama but happily settle for melodrama and nice little crises that resolve themselves by the end of each episode. It's a soap opera, pure and simple and my mother loves it so

who am I to abuse her? Still, I can't respect a heroine who spurns the delightful George Rainsford as Jimmy; it doesn't help that actress Jessica Raine is the weakest of the bunch and each emotion must be telegraphed by her face every single time. What really keeps me watching is the wonderful Miranda Hart as Chummy, a blue-blood who wants to be useful. Spin-off, please!

I'm a huge fan of Elijah Wood (he's talented, handsome and has great taste in music, so what's not to like) and his stoner comedy *Wilfred* about a guy who thinks his neighbor's dog is talking to him keeps me tuning in. Season Two was about as solid as season one, though I prefer when the show is sweet and the dog not quite so manipulative. They should be helping each other, not fighting each other. Catching the original Australian series is trippy. It's got the same vibe, the same level of thc and often the same basic storylines. But since I saw the American version first and they captured the spirit of the series so well, I have the weird feeling the original Aussie show is ripping off the remake. Whoa! Someone call Bill & Ted; I think I just blew my mind.

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