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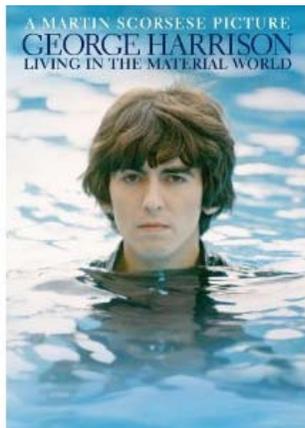
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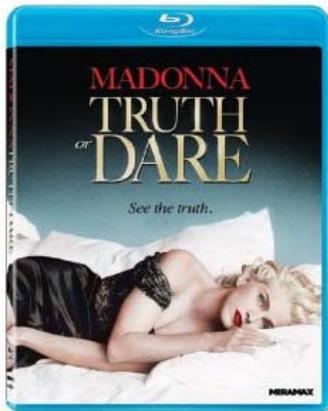
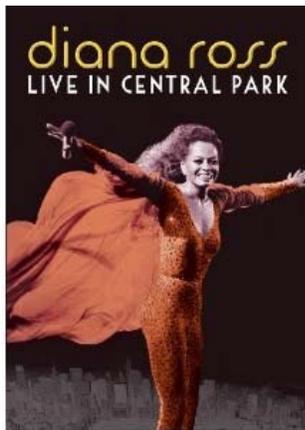


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George Harrison Living in the Material World (\$24.98 BluRay; UME)

Diana Ross Live in Central Park (\$16.98; Shout)

Madonna Truth Or Dare (\$14.99 BluRay; Miramax/Lionsgate) -- Shame on any critics who lazily praised *Living In The Material World*, Martin Scorsese's documentary about George Harrison. I'm a serious Beatles fan, so of course I watched every moment. But this is a poorly directed, poorly edited, poorly focused film that is a major lost opportunity. No one will ever again have Paul and Ringo and George Martin and Harrison's wife and son sitting down and ready to talk at length about him. And Scorsese blew it. Split into two parts, the first half spends much of its time rehashing the story of the Beatles. Before that we get a confused chronology of events that skims over his childhood, including a brief quote from two Harrison men about his childhood home. Are they his brothers, his uncles, his cousins? I haven't the foggiest. If you're going to re-tell the story of the Beatles, obviously this documentary gives you a chance to do it from a fresh perspective by focusing strictly on the experience from Harrison's point of view. Scorsese doesn't bother.

Start with songwriting. What happened the first time Harrison turned up with a song? Did he go to John or Paul first? Did he ask for permission? Did he present it to the group? Did he approach Martin? Did he audition his song for Martin the way John and Paul did, on acoustic guitar? How did the others react? Were they proud? Jealous? Was that first song rejected? Was he encouraged? The unasked questions go on and on. Similar missed opportunities exist throughout. Spirituality is something of a thread, though even that isn't consistent. His career as a film producer is treated as a lark that focuses only on *Life Of Brian*. His lack of a cohesive solo career is perhaps understandably glossed over, though obviously Harrison thrived in a group setting like even the modest endeavor *The Traveling Wilburys* more than he did on his own. It's a deeply frustrating work.

Scorsese did a great job with the Bob Dylan project, probably because Dylan hasn't cooperated with anyone too much so his story was quite fresh. But the chance to explore the quiet Beatle won't ever come again in this way, and Scorsese falls very short. Of course, most pop stars can be enjoyed best on stage.

Diana Ross was at the peak of her considerable solo fame when she performed in Central Park. Happily, this DVD contains both the rain-shortened first day and the return when she wowed the crowd with all her diva charm. Like most superstars, Ross yearns for attention and approval and love and on what better stage to receive it? Now if only Mayor Bloomberg would get Billy Joel and Elton John to stage a concert in the park, this great tradition would continue.

Madonna's career will surely inspire countless documentaries and studies in the future. But the *Truth Or*



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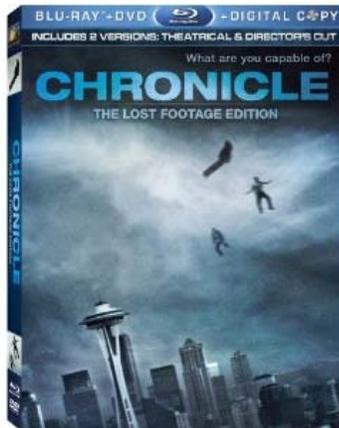
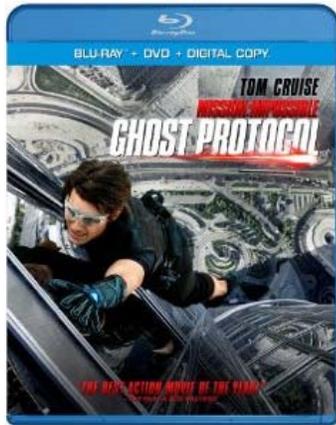


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Dare film -- which might have been a concert throwaway -- is in fact a pretty enduring look at media manipulation and how she exploited the spotlight and turned the attention into its own provocative performance. True, the offstage footage is far more compelling than the actual performances, but Madonna would grow as a live entertainer by leaps and bounds (thanks to hard work) in the years to come.



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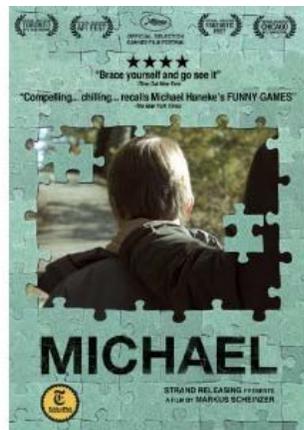
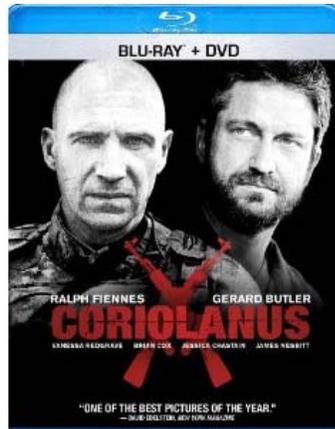
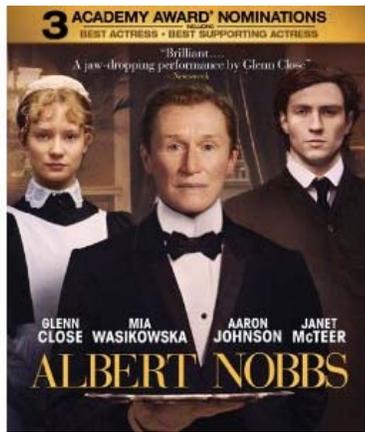


Yoga



Marlo Thomas

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Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol (\$44.99 BluRay DVD combo; Paramount)

Chronicle (\$39.99 BluRay DVD combo; Fox)

Pariah (\$34.98 BluRay; Universal)

Albert Nobbs (\$39.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

Coriolanus (\$29.99 BluRay; Weinstein Company)

Michael (\$27.99; Strand) -- *Ghost Protocol* is a triumph for everyone involved. It's Tom Cruise's best starring role in many years and puts him back on top of his game. It's easily the best *Mission Impossible* movie -- they finally got the spirit of the TV show. And it's a great live action debut for Pixar vet Brad Pitt. The clarity and fun of the action scenes is surely to his enormous credit.

Chronicle is a great surprise. Despite the hoopla, I wasn't holding out much hope for this tale of teenagers who get superhero powers. But it's exactly what you want from a B movie -- a clever premise delivered with no muss or fuss. It almost -- almost -- reaches greatness though the climax doesn't quite satisfy as much as it might emotionally. But it comes close.

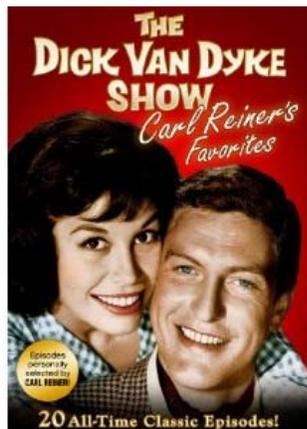
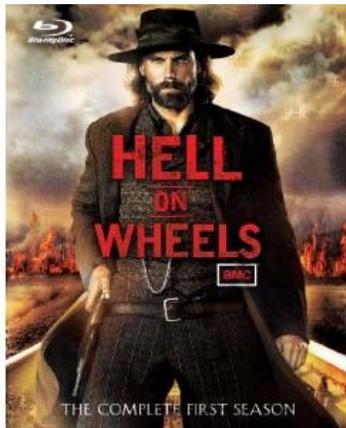
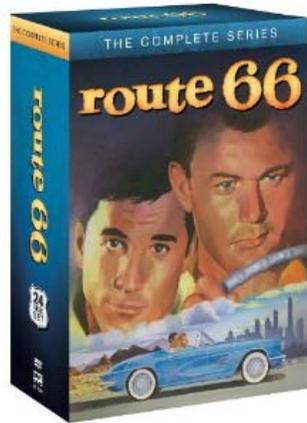
Pariah is a notable debut but it's such a personal project for writer-director Dee Rees about growing up gay in Brooklyn that I'm not certain whether this is the beginning of a major career or simply the one

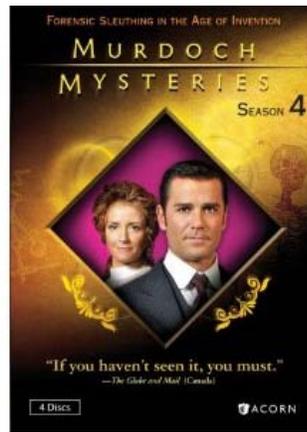
story she was born to tell. Well acted and done all around; I'll certainly keep an eye out for her second film.

Glenn Close also delivered a passion project with *Albert Nobbs*, her long-gestating tale of a woman who disguises herself as a man so she can get a job and support herself. It's ultimately a curiosity, but Close and Janet McTeer have fun and Aaron Johnson continues to impress me as the real deal.

Ralph Fiennes has fun with one of Shakespeare's lesser plays and Gerard Butler handles the verse better than one would expect. *Coriolanus* is sure to be a teacher's favorite in high school English classes for years to come.

And *Michael* tells a very creepy tale very well. The protagonist is an anonymous drone who has a little boy chained up in his basement. Watching him go about his daily life while having this horrific secret is dreadful and compelling. The scene where he is trying to lure another little boy is as tense and dramatic as any action scene you'll see. It becomes a bit of a cold-blooded case study but for its sheer technical mastery, this is a very, very intriguing and promising debut by director Marcus Schleinzer. I can't wait to see what he does next.





Route 66 -- The Complete Series (\$129.99; Shout)

Hell on Wheels -- The Complete First Season (\$44.98 BluRay; EOne)

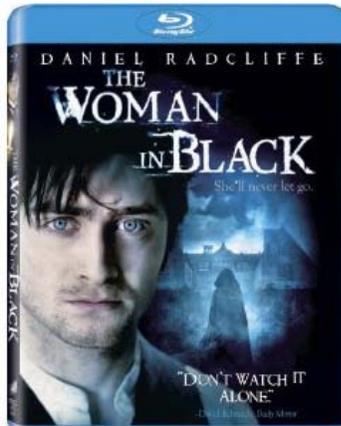
The Dick Van Dyke Show -- Carl Reiner's Favorites (\$24.98; Image)

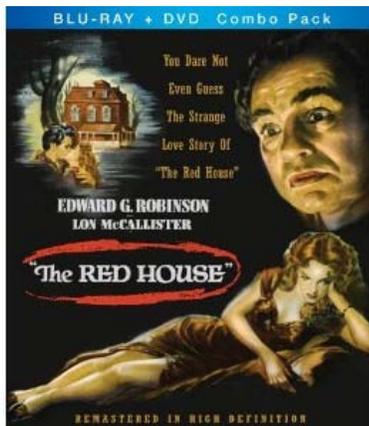
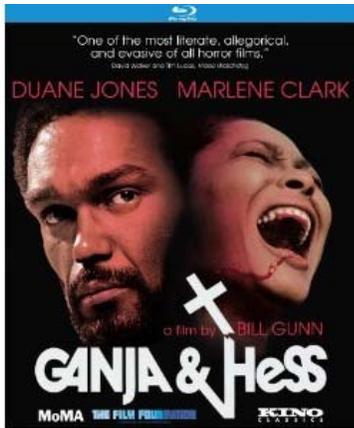
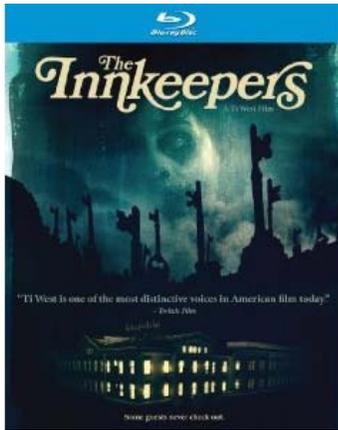
Murdoch Mysteries -- Season Four (\$59.99; Acorn) -- I'm very conflicted about *Route 66*. It's a landmark series and good to see available however poorly its presentation. An earlier company put out three seasons of very variable quality and then disappeared. Shout stepped in and now we have all four seasons in a compact set with good graphics. But the hardcore fans who bought the first three seasons must buy them all over again to get season four. And the presentation simply isn't up to the Shout Factory standards. They rescued an orphan here from oblivion, but this show deserves better.

I'll admit I lost interest in AMC's *Hell on Wheels* as the first season progressed. But it's a western and TV doesn't have nearly enough of them; besides, the post-Civil War setting is specific and interesting enough to bring me back. I'll catch up on what happened before season two begins.

The Dick Van Dyke Show is a great show and happily has what every long-running sitcom of quality deserves. Every season available in great sets and a smart greatest hits package. That Fan Favorite set contains 20 episodes. Here are another 20 chosen by creator Carl Reiner. So for a very small price you can have 40 of the best episodes of one of TV's greats. Every show should be so lucky.

Season 4 of *Murdoch Mysteries*, the genial Canadian series about Victorian-era crime fighters, is good fun for fans of the genre. Murdoch (Yannick Bisson) is a lot better at catching bad guys than at pretending he doesn't care anymore for Dr. Julia Ogden (Helene Joy) and thank goodness.





The Woman in Black (\$35.99 BluRay; Sony)

The Innkeepers (\$34.98 BluRay; Dark Sky Films)

True Blood -- The Complete Fourth Season (\$79.98 BluRay; HBO)

Ganja & Hess (\$29.95; Kino)

The Red House (\$15.99 BluRay; HD Cinema Classics) -- Daniel Radcliffe delivers his most mature film performance to date in the enjoyably old fashioned horror movie *The Woman In Black*. It's a pity the resolution isn't as good as the set-up but it's quite fun for a while.

The Innkeepers is very similar -- this story of employees at a spooky old Victorian inn on its last legs is another throwback to the era when horror films meant atmosphere and fine actors hamming it up rather than blood and gore. Kelly McGillis has great fun as a drunken psychic though again the finale lets you down.

Fans of *True Blood* haven't felt let down by the series yet, no matter how outrageous it becomes. You'll be utterly adrift for a while but like any soap you catch up quick so no need to fear jumping right in. As always, HBO offers top quality extras.

Ganja & Hess is a landmark blaxploitation vampire movie (yep, that's right) I've always found more interesting in the abstract than to actually watch. One problem is that it *wants* to be taken seriously. But it's presented with great care here by Kino.

Finally, it's not strictly a horror film but since screams in the woods set off the action in this spooky tale of a farmer (Edward G. Robinson), his daughter and the secret of the abandoned red house, I think it fits in nicely. Consider *The Red House* from 1947 to be horror-noir.

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