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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: April 11, 2010 04:40 PM

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Sixteen New DVDs You Must Check Out

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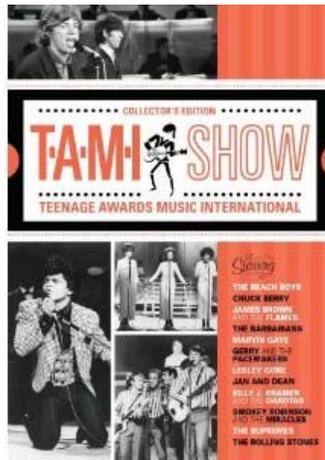
I've been lax the last few months so it's time to play catch up. Here are 16 DVD releases that are the best of the best from the first four months of 2010. Out of the hundreds if not thousands of DVD titles put out, these are ones you shouldn't miss. Rent them, buy them, stream them; do whatever you want. Just don't miss them.

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BECK IN TROUBLE?
Dropped From New York Radio Station, TV Ratings



T.A.M.I. Show (\$19.93; Shout) -- This is the Moby Dick of rock concerts, a long sought after, almost fabled show from 1964. We've seen scratchy excerpts, breathless descriptions but --until now -- not the actual show itself. The Supremes, Marvin Gaye, the Beach Boys, the Rolling Stones, Lesley Gore, Smokey Robinson & The Miracles -- just listing the acts that appeared is exciting. Shout has done an exemplary job of restoring the film. From the Chuck Berry opener -- with guys and gals dancing their asses off in the background (including Teri Garr!) -- it's clear this is as much time capsule as concert and indeed the screams of the high school students in the audience often drown out the sound from the tiny speakers available in those days. Some great camerawork (such as an extreme, slow zoom into a close-up of Diana Ross) show genuine artistry. But it's mostly an enjoyable spectacle...until James Brown and the Flames take the stage. It's been repeated so often it must be gospel by now: this little-seen concert has always been touted as the absolute pinnacle of Brown captured on film. Well, there's no need for any faith in that statement any longer. Watching him galvanize the audience with all his showmanship (the repeated collapsing to the ground, remarkable dancing, etc.), it's not just James Brown at his best but pop music at its revolutionary best. Before Brown, *T.A.M.I.* was a great peek back at pop in its early days. After Brown, it's a landmark.



The African Queen (\$39.99 BluRay or \$25.99 regular; Paramount) -- *The African Queen* scares me. Not the film itself; it's a grand entertainment with Katharine Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart gently satirizing their screen personas while creating indelible, genuine characters. It's one of many peaks by John Huston but not listed among the greats as often as it should be simply because it's so much uncomplicated fun. No, what scares me is that this film was unavailable so long and had fallen into disrepair. If a wildly popular film featuring two of Hollywood's biggest stars can go missing so long, what's happening to more obscure works?

Fall
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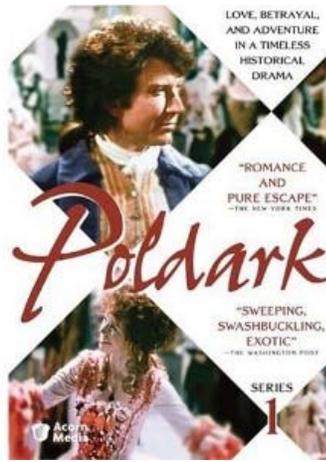


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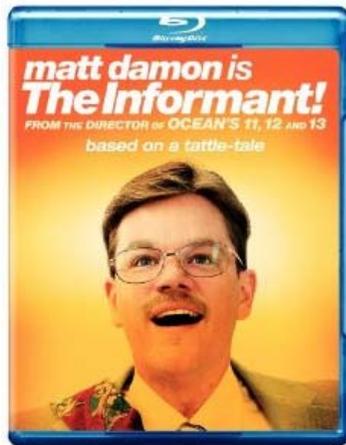
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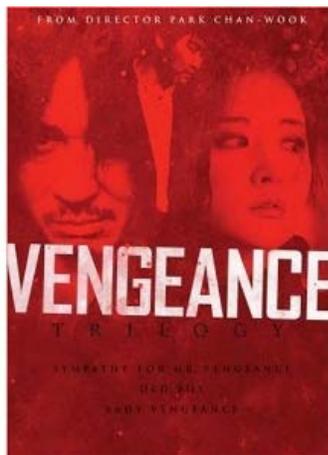
-  **John Legend Parties With Pauly D, 'Precious'**
-  **John Edwards Proposes to Mistress Already?**



Poldark Set 1 (\$69.99; Acorn) -- What a goofy name. Poldark. For decades, it kept me from watching this Masterpiece Theatre classic from 1977. How dashing can someone named "Poldark" actually be? Pretty darn dashing as it turns out. His one-time love Elizabeth (Jill Townsend) may be a bit of a pill, but Poldark returns from fighting in the colonies to late 1700s Britain and fights to reestablish his estate, revitalize his copper mine and revenge himself on those who betrayed his interests. Tremendous fun and season two comes out in the fall.



The Informant (\$35.99 on BluRay and \$28.98 regular; Warner Bros.) -- Matt Damon got an Oscar nomination last year, but for the wrong movie. This Steven Soderbergh film based on the true story of the highest-ranking whistleblower in US history is hilariously good. The score by Marvin Hamlisch is wickedly funny and sets the perfect tone for this look at a seemingly clueless executive who cooperates with federal investigators in the most bumbling fashion imaginable, from "narrating" his every move into hidden mikes ("I am now walking into the building") to the great finale. Boy, Damon is good. One of the best films of the year and a movie whose stock is certain to rise in years to come.



J.Lo's Ex's Girlfriend Files For Restraining Order

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Paltrow Dishes on Cruise Kiss



Raven Symone's Huge Weight Loss



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MOST DISCUSSED RIGHT NOW



Natalie Portman: I Was 'Barely Eating' During 'Black Swan'

124 Comments



Camille Grammer's Porn Past Comes Back To Haunt Her

806 Comments

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Animal Torture as Entertainment? Shame on Showtime's *Shameless!*

6 Comments



PHOTOS: Olivia Wilde Dons See-Through Bikini

50 Comments

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Beastie Boys Rapper Beats Cancer

61 Comments



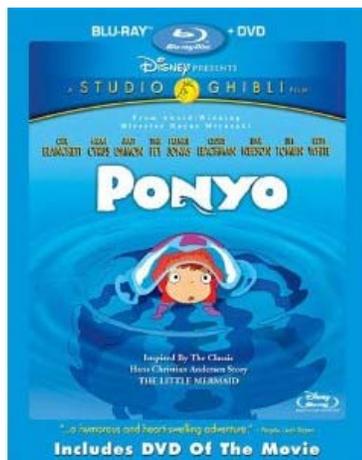
PHOTOS: Natalie Portman Reveals Engagement Ring

4 Comments

Vengeance Trilogy (\$49.99 Vivendi/Palisades Tartan Asia Extreme) -- At the end of 2010, this is definitely going to be one of the boxed sets everyone singles out. It's a Criterion-worthy collection of three films in a loose "vengeance" trilogy by director Park Chan-wook: *Sympathy For Mr. Vengeance*, *Oldboy*, *Lady Vengeance*. They play perfectly well on their own, but do rebound and reflect on each other in fascinating ways taken as a whole. *Oldboy* -- about a businessman imprisoned in a room by mysterious assailants -- is perhaps the best known in the US, but all three are exceptional thrillers. The DVDs are bursting with extras including multiple commentary tracks, alternate versions, deleted scenes, making-of documentaries and more. Essential viewing.



Thirtysomething COMPLETE SECOND SEASON (\$59.99; Shout) -- This is the second of three seasons for this yuppie drama and it's the one where the show leaped from a pop culture phenomenon to greatness. Mostly, this was due to the introduction of the Machiavellian businessman Miles Drentell, who slapped Michael and Elliot (and the show) out of its hyper-articulate faux maturity into a realization that the big bad world is pretty scary and confusing, even for people who are smart, good-looking and prepared to analyze every move in agonizing detail. Cast interviews and commentaries are included, but as always it's the show itself that really matters and *thirtysomething* delivers. The final season comes out May 11.



Ponyo (\$39.99 BluRay combo or \$29.99 regular; Disney) -- Disney released the much-ballyhooed but bland *The Princess and the Frog* in 2009, a return to hand-drawn animation. But far far better is the latest gem from Hayao Miyazaki, the master from Japan who has deeply influenced Pixar and any animator worth their salt. A gentle spin on *The Little Mermaid*, it involves a little boy who befriends a goldfish. The goldfish falls in love with him, tries to take human form and unwittingly unleashes a gigantic storm. This sounds far more dramatic than the beautiful, dream-like tone set at the very beginning and maintained throughout this sweet story. Best of all, Disney took *Ponyo* as an excuse to remaster and re-release other Miyazaki gems like *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Castle In The Sky* (\$29.99 each; Disney) all of which should be devoured by anyone with children or a love of animation or who just enjoys good films.

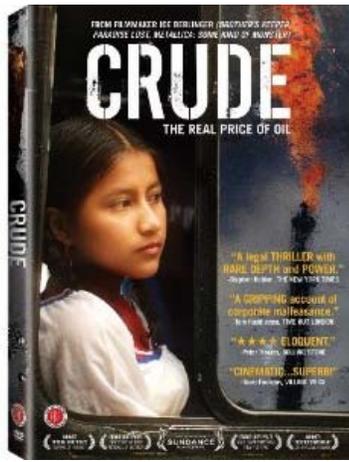
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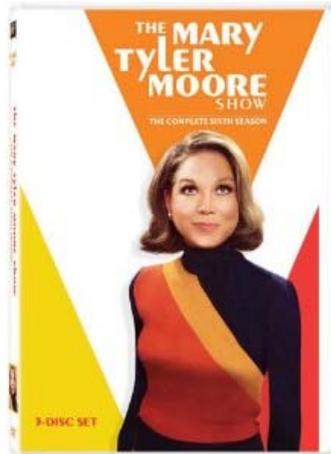
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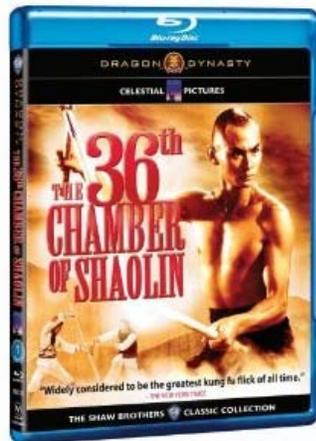




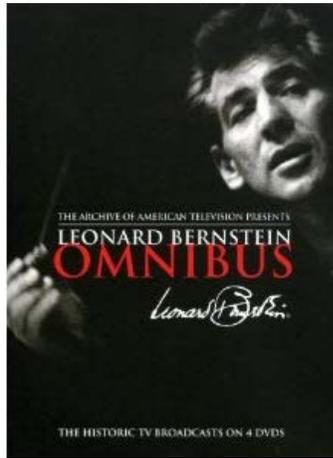
Crude (\$24.95; First Run Features) -- Director Joe Berlinger is developing a fascinating resume as a documentary filmmaker. As my friend Aaron said, he seems to tackle complex issues, but in fact illuminates them as very simple and clear. Whether it's *Paradise Lost* (in which teens are wrongly targeted as murderers simply because they listen to goth music) or *Crude*, in which a wildly complex court case is shown as indigenous people of Ecuador suffering and dying due to the neglect of Chevron and other oil companies. Throw in *Brothers Keeper* and *Metallica: Some Kind Of Monster* and you've got a director in the midst of one of the more intriguing careers around. Presented with typical care by FRF.



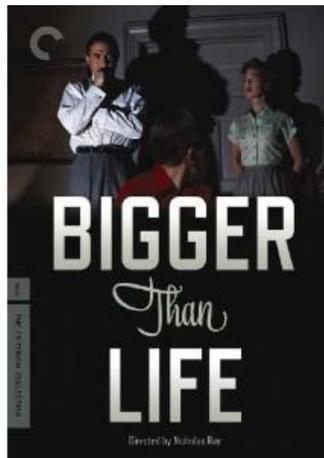
The Mary Tyler Moore Show Sixth Season (\$29.98; Fox) -- It's quite simply the greatest sitcom of all time. No other sitcom has delivered more brilliantly for more years than this one. It got better and better every single season. Indeed, this penultimate season includes "Chuckles Bites The Dust," the best episode of them all and it's far from the only gem. Only short run series like *Fawlty Towers* and *The Office* (UK) come close to the legendary accomplishment of this. Nearly 35 years on and it remains as funny, sweet and beautifully acted as ever.



The 36th Chamber of Shaolin (\$19.97 on BluRay; Dragon Dynasty/Vivendi) -- I'm not a martial arts expert, so it's kind of trippy to see a landmark film like this and realize how influential it's been on movies I have seen, including everything from *The Karate Kid* to *Kung Fu Panda* to just about any film where an apprentice learns his craft. Interestingly, this isn't non-stop action but mostly an engrossing training film as our hero masters kung fu. This is not a sterling print but it's solid and inexpensive with some extras to give it context. Also out on DVD is *Return To 36th Chamber* (\$19.93 regular DVD; Vivendi/Dragon Dynasty), one of the great sequels. In this case, they said, enough of the training. Let's fight!



Leonard Bernstein Omnibus (\$49.98; E1 Entertainment) -- The footage shows its age, but this is a rare opportunity to see Leonard Bernstein in full teacher mode as he gently leads audiences through Beethoven's Fifth, jazz, the art of conducting and more. It's amazing to think of this in prime time on a major network, but that's exactly what the classy and popular *Omnibus* on CBS did for years. It's great that they dug out so many of his talks, since anyone interested in one of them will want them all, including What Makes Opera Grand, The Music Of J.S. Bach, Modern Music and Musical Comedy. Plus there's a performance of that warhorse Handel's Messiah. Well done. Also out is *King Lear* (\$29.98; E1) with Orson Welles in an 82 minute presentation of the Peter Brooks version. Again, it's from 1953 and the age shows. While it's rather pricey, they have stuffed it with great extras including a preview from the week before, a later talk on the Globe Theatre, Alistair Cooke reporting live from the Yale Shakespeare Festival and more.



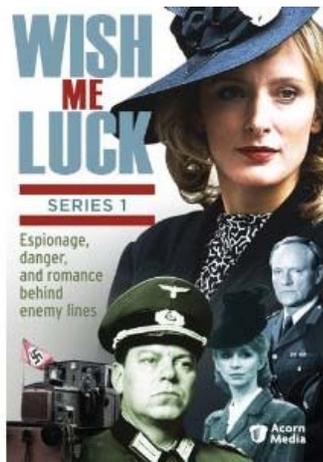
Bigger Than Life (\$39.95; Criterion) -- I can't remember the last time a release from Criterion WASN'T one of the best of the year, either a beautiful presentation of a film I love or some great work they introduced me to. Nicholas Ray's *Bigger Than Life* is the latter, an absolutely gorgeous, Sirk-like meditation on suburbia and a man (James Mason) trapped by his life who becomes horribly addicted to cortisone. It's not really a "problem" film about addiction but more about shattering a seemingly placid life into jagged little pieces. Superlative filmmaking and the extras include commentary from scholars, an interview with Ray's widow, an appreciation by writer Jonathan Lethem and more.



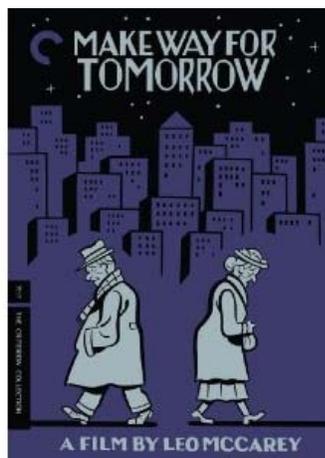
Doctor Who: The Complete Specials (\$59.98 on BluRay and \$49.98 regular; BBC) -- I pity the poor Doctor who has to follow David Tennant. But what a grand send-off these final specials were, from the amusingly misleading *The Next Doctor* to the fun *Planet Of The Dead* to the creepy *The Waters Of Mars* and the wonderful, heartbreaking two-part *The End Of Time*. The Doctor's final words in this incarnation are typical of the great work of Russell T. Davies -- poignant, funny, spot-on for the scene, perfect for fans, Tennant himself and yet also deeply true for anyone facing death. He said, simply, "I don't want to go." It's enough to make a hardened DVD critic get all misty-eyed.



Where the Wild Things Are (\$35.99 on BluRay and \$28.99 regular; Warner Bros.) -- Like *The Informant*, this was one of the best films of 2009. It beautifully expanded on the picture book by Maurice Sendak to show a sad little boy who runs away from home to be with himself only to find that even imaginary friends can come with baggage. The wonderfully named Max Records (he should start his own music label) gives a truly great performance as Max. It's a raw, wounded, heartbreaking film that's really for adults. Bold stuff. Also out is *Tell Them Anything You Want* (\$24.99; Oscilloscope), a look at the legendary author Sendak in all his controversial glory, presented lovingly by Lance Bangs and Spike Jonze.



Wish Me Luck Series 1 (\$39.99; Acorn) -- This ITV series from 1988 is a corker about women recruited as spies by SOE and trained and then sent into occupied France. If you're like me, that's all you need to know. With only 23 episodes in all, I do wish they'd just released the entire show in one fell swoop. Also out is *Wartime Britain* (\$69.99; Acorn), a grab bag of three different works: a Harold Pinter screenplay of romance and danger as Michael Gambon forces a woman to have sex with him or undermine her real lover's possible treason, the story of a housewife who blossoms during her volunteer efforts (both of them movies) and the great miniseries *Island At War*, about life on a Channel Island occupied by the Nazis.



Make Way for Tomorrow (\$29.95; Criterion) -- I've literally saved the best for last. For years I'd heard about this little-seen Leo McCarey film from 1937, which is almost never seen on TV and basically unavailable. McCarey is one of Hollywood's greats, from pairing Laurel & Hardy and overseeing their best work to "creating" Cary Grant in *The Awful Truth*, giving Bing Crosby his most popular role in *Going My Way*, the praised *Ruggles Of Red Gap* and this, the film most of his contemporaries considered McCarey's masterpiece. Indeed. It's the heartbreaking story of an elderly couple who lose their home and have to be split up among their children, just for a while mind you. Both are in the way in their respective homes and miss each other terribly. Does that even begin to capture how masterful this movie is? How in about three minutes they tell us everything we need to know about the couple, their children and what will happen to them? Does it describe the brilliant, unsentimental acting of Victor Moore and especially Beulah Bondi, who was easily 30 years younger than the age she was playing and delivered one of the great moments in acting history in her final scene? Wonderful extras place the film in its historical context (Social Security was just coming online) and make the argument for McCarey's greatness. All you need to do is watch this film. It's one of the champs.

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Stacey Nemour: Inside the Life of a Shaolin Monk

Most martial artists are familiar with the extraordinary powers of the Shaolin monks. I recently had the great fortune of sharing the afternoon with Sifu Wang Bo, a Shaolin monk who was 11 years old when on tour with "Wheel of Life."

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DMohr 03:17 PM on 4/12/2010



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I kept scrolling down this list and saying, "nope, nope, nope, nope, nope..." until I got to your very last title and literally gasped with joy. BULLSEYE!!! Perfect pick, Michael, I couldn't possibly agree more with your pick of "the best for last". 'Make Way for Tomorrow' truly must be seen to be believed.

(I would only add that a 1953 CBS TV performance of 'King Lear' starring Orson Welles was released on DVD this past February, and it's amazing, especially - of course - Welles as Lear.)

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situationcritical 12:19 AM on 4/12/2010



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Don't forget that Toni Basil danced and choreographed on the T.A.M.I. show! I'll be picking this one up.

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Michael Giltz 10:46 AM on 4/14/2010



59 Fans

Thanks for mentioning Toni, who definitely is having a fascinating, Zelig-like career in popular music.

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