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## ENTERTAINMENT

### DVDs: *Skyfall*, *Argo* and Other Oscar Hopefuls Ready to Watch

Posted: 02/19/2013 5:55 pm

A slew of Oscar hopefuls hit shelves just in time for you to check them out before the awards show on Sunday night.



**Skyfall** (\$39.99 Blu-ray combo; MGM)

**Argo** (\$35.99 Blu-ray combo; Warner Bros.)

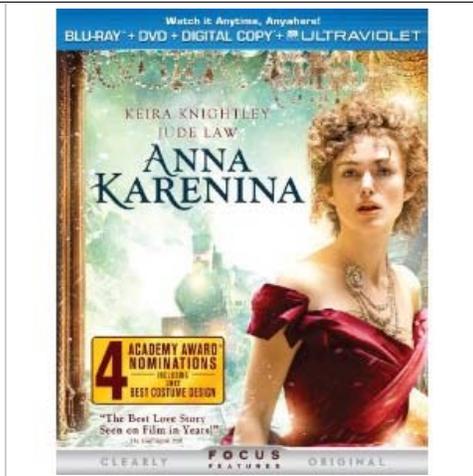
**Anna Karenina** (\$34.98 Blu-ray combo; Focus/Universal)

**The Sessions** (\$29.99 Blu-ray; Fox Searchlight)

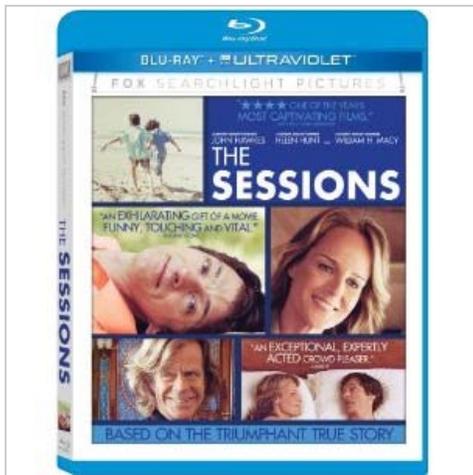
**The Loretta Young Show 100th Birthday Edition** (\$99.99 DVD; Timeless) -- The greatest James Bond film of all time resides only in our mind. It's some sort of platonic ideal that combines a clever gadget or two, a Bond Girl of breathtaking beauty and acting chops to boot; a tremendous villain that is both genuinely threatening and real, intense drama, excellent set pieces that are both viscerally thrilling and well-acted a la Harrison Ford in *Raiders* and so on and so forth. *Skyfall* comes darn close though I'm a little surprised as to why this particular Bond should have finally broken through into the category of mega-franchise. I know earlier editions were blockbusters when you adjust for inflation, but still. Oh and I almost forgot: a great theme song. That to me is where *Skyfall* joins the all-time Top 5 for sure. The movie should have been nominated for Best Picture and Best Supporting Actress for Judi Dench, but it absolutely deserves to win Best Song.



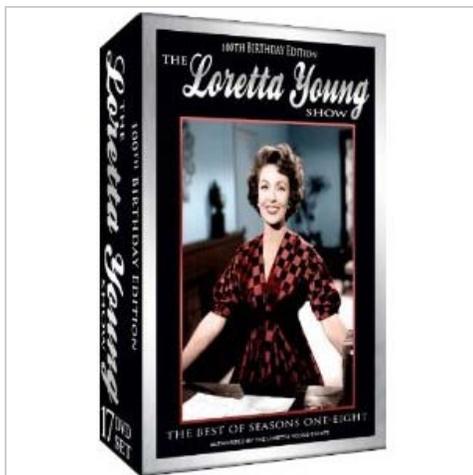
*Argo* is pegged to win Best Picture and it already feels like a pleasant movie that has been over-praised a tad. It's fun, though I thought there was a scene that was too much with Alan Arkin and John Goodman back in the U.S. Ironically, it deserves more notice for Ben Affleck's



direction (which wasn't nominated) than as a movie overall. Don't get me wrong. It could remain on my ever-changing best of the year list. But *The Master* and *Amour* and *Django Unchained*, to name three, rank much higher and will age well.



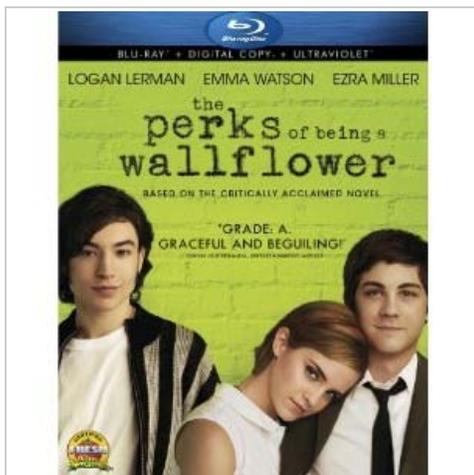
*Anna Karenina* made bold choices in its presentation: The movie is "artificial," with actors sometimes performing their scenes onstage, at other times wandering "off set" and revealing backstage equipment and ladders and fake walls and the like. While it added little to the film, I found this essentially fine. The problem, unfortunately, is with the casting and the sprawling nature of the novel which doesn't condense well into a film. This same team making a ten-hour miniseries would unquestionably produce a better work. But for me Keira Knightley and especially Aaron Taylor-Johnson are not right. Taylor-Johnson in particular is an actor I like very much but is wholly unsuited to the role of the magnetic Vronsky. Jude Law is better as Anna's cold husband but that's not enough to make the movie any more than a curiosity. For heaven's sake, read the book.



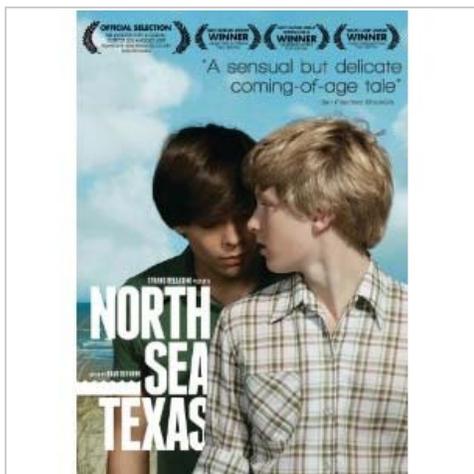
For one brief moment, *The Sessions* seemed like an Oscar juggernaut. John Hawkes fell by the wayside but Helen Hunt snagged yet another nomination for her work as a sex therapist. Nothing succeeds like success. Both actors notably came from TV, where Hawkes achieved a

high profile on *Deadwood* and Hunt became an Emmy favorite on *Mad About You*.

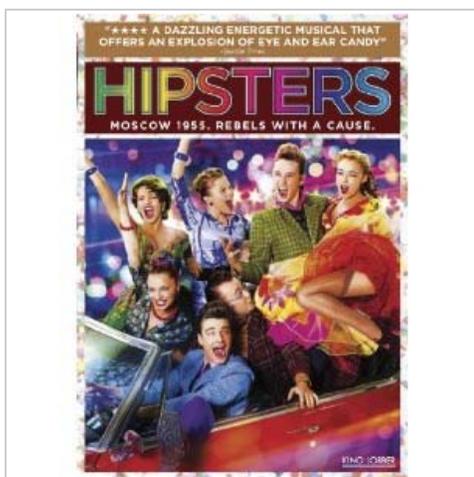
Once upon a time, crossing back and forth between TV and film was seen as hard and definitive. (If you headed to TV, your film career was over.) That was certainly the case for Oscar winner Loretta Young. She headed to TV in 1953 and enjoyed massive success in an anthology series that ran for eight seasons in various formats. This set -- *The Loretta Young Show 100th Birthday Edition* -- contains more than 60 hours of television drawn from the more than 160 episodes she made, offering comedies and usually inspiring dramas about women facing an issue or crisis. Young won multiple Emmys and never made another feature film. But at least we will always have her twirling at the start of every episode to show off a new dress and reading inspirational passages from the Bible and other texts at the end. A different era, to say the least.



*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (\$24.99 Blu-ray; Summit)  
*North Sea Texas* (\$27.99 DVD; Strand)  
*Hipsters* (\$29.95 DVD; Kino Lorber)  
*Our Paradise* (\$21.99 DVD; Breaking Glass/QC Cinema) -- *The Perks Of Being A Wallflower* is a very faithful adaptation of a coming of age novel put out by MTV as the first book in its publishing imprint. It was an auspicious choice that struck a chord with teens and has sold hundreds of thousands of copies ever since. The flaws of the book are on full display in the film (it was directed by the author), including earnestness and the feeling that the person living it has never read a coming of age tale before and so what is by now familiar cliché is presented as if it's a fresh insight. Still, the excellent cast raises the material, with Emma Watson subtle and good as the object of desire, Ezra Miller good in the difficult role of the increasingly flamboyant gay teen and Logan Lerman exceptional as our rather passive hero.



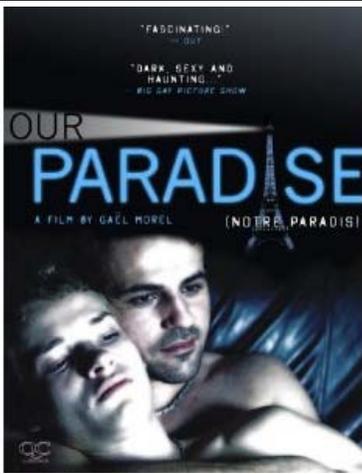
Another film with gay storylines is *North Sea Texas*, the long-awaited feature film debut by the talented shorts director Bavo Defurne. Here he delivers an atypically realistic, quiet coming of age tale, as opposed to his Pink Narcissus-like fever dream shorts. A festival favorite, it didn't reach a wider audience but Defurne's talent deserves one.



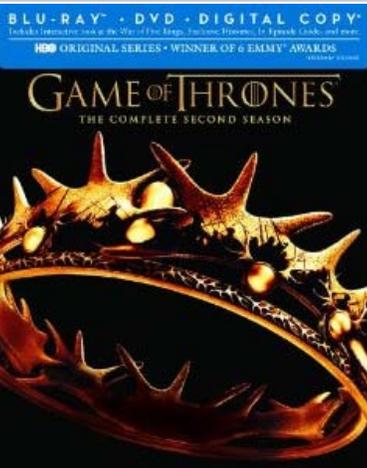
Also worthy of more notice was *Hipsters*, a light Russian film that shows teenagers rebelling -- for a time -- in 1955 Moscow. The movie has fun mocking Russian cinema styles and -- continuing the gay theme -- there's a subplot about a comrade who'd like to be more than just comrades with our hero.

Finally, *Our Paradise* is strictly for the gay festival crowd, though it is a good showcase for director Gael Morel (who starred in the classic *Wild Reeds* and has since directed a number of films) and actor Dmitri Durdaine.

*Game of Thrones The Complete Second Season* (\$79.98 Blu-ray; HBO)  
*Battlestar Galactica: Blood & Chrome* (\$34.98 Blu-ray combo; SyFy/Universal)  
*Naked City: 20 Star-Filled Episodes*

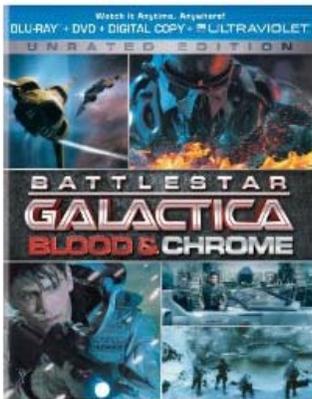


(\$24.98 DVD; Image)  
*Weeds 8th and Final Season* (\$39.97 Blu-ray; Lionsgate)



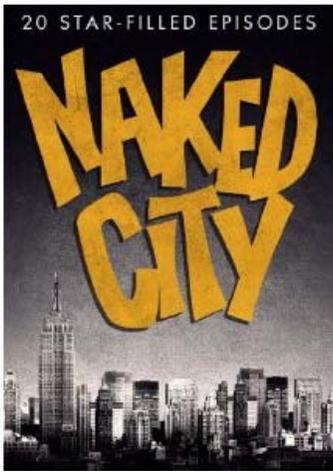
*Nurse Jackie Season Four* (\$39.97 Blu-ray; Lionsgate)

*Hats Off to Dr. Seuss: Collectors Edition* (\$59.99 Blu-ray; Warner Bros.) -- *Game Of Thrones* improved notably over season one, so maybe it's adamant fans will cut me some slack this time. It's still not nearly as rich as the novels the series is based on, but that should improve once they spend two seasons tackling the storylines of each book rather than just one. Mind you, the main reason season two is better is that Peter Dinklage gets more screen time. So it's not that they've improved in so many areas, just wisely played to their strength (and the plot of the books). The Blu-ray set is loaded with extras and looks terrific, by the way. And it's a lot more fun to binge watch the show so you can keep all the rivalries straight in your head.

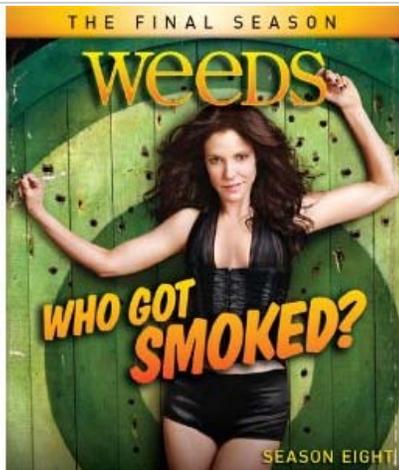


*Battlestar Galactica: Blood & Chrome* is a series designed to be seen on the web in brief bursts. Those webisodes have been collected onto one set, which is handy. But keep in mind the source -- this is of the highest quality when compared to other web-only shows but not up to the standards of the classic reboot from which it sprang. Still, you can't help wondering what if for this prequel set during the first Cylon War. Ah well, better to leave well enough alone.

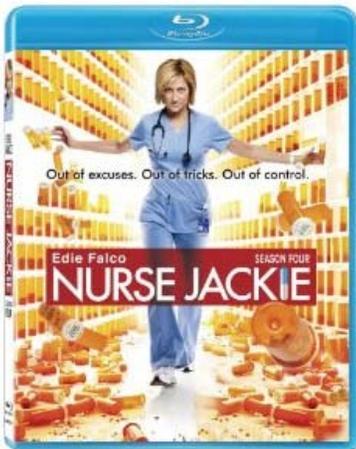
*Naked City* is one of TV's early notable dramas. Sort of the *Law & Order* of its day, with shooting on the streets of NYC adding immensely to the realism of its cops and robbers storylines. Essentially an anthology, it changed stars repeatedly throughout its tentative five year run. The DVD releases have been just as scattershot. If you haven't bought any before, this set takes a grab bag of



episodes notable for cameos by soon to be famous stars. If we're not going to get full season sets, this is as good a random approach as any and at least gives you 20 episodes out of the 138 they made. A solid sampler.



*Weeds* never quite maintained the critical notice of its first season (unlike *Breaking Bad*). But Mary Louise Parker has consistently had fun and if you've stuck with it all the way, you surely want to see how it all turns out. Still, it would have been much better off with a shorter run. but then you could say that about just any TV series you can name that lasted more than five seasons.



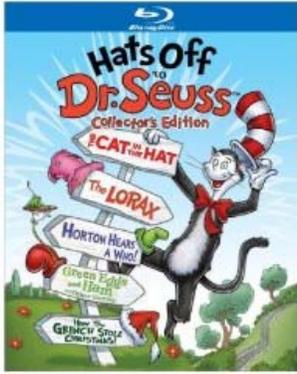
Still bizarrely labeled a comedy, the blackly humorous drama *Nurse Jackie* continues to give Edie Falco one of the most complex heroines on TV. It too should start eyeing a finish line, but you can understand how hard it is to give up a vehicle with such a rollercoaster of a part.

Finally, they've been collected repeatedly in various versions, but here you get most of the Dr. Seuss specials (and all the big ones) on Blu-ray. It's also rather pricey, even though you get nine specials in all. But for the content itself, you can't beat *The Cat In The Hat*, *Horton Hears A Who* and *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*, three classic TV specials and surely some of the best adaptations of a picture book we'll ever likely see. Just watch the movies again if you want to be reminded what a blessing these are.

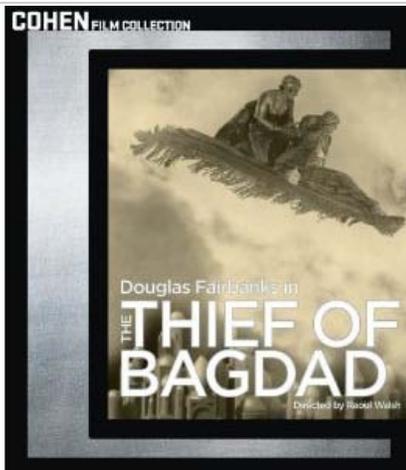
*The Thief of Baghdad* (\$24.98 Blu-ray; Cohen Film Collection)

*Laura* (\$24.99 Blu-ray; FOX)

*Die Hard 25th Anniversary Blu-ray*



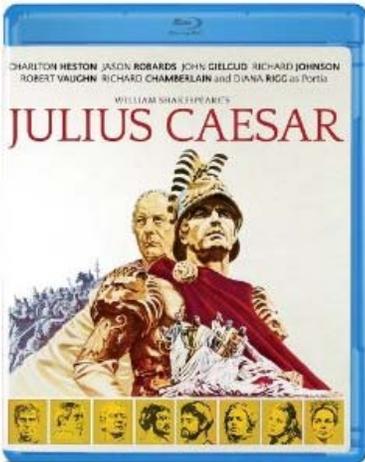
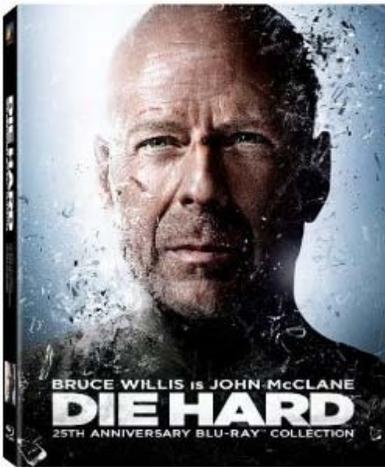
*Collection* (\$59.99 Blu-ray; FOX)  
*The Complete Adventures of Flash Gordon* (\$19.98 DVD; Image)  
*Julius Caesar* (\$29.95 Blu-ray; Olive/Paramount)  
*Don Giovanni* (\$29.95 Blu-ray; Olive/Paramount)  
*Les Miserables* (\$29.95 Blu-ray; Olive/Paramount) -- Cohen Film Collections is the first release of a new imprint devoted to releasing the classic films and shorts in its library. The Douglas Fairbanks version of *The Thief Of Baghdad* is a corker and a promising launch to the series, given its fine restoration. The extras are modest but personally I'm more concerned about the quality of the film and they deliver here. it's as good as I've seen.



*Laura* is one of the all-time noir champs and contains an iconic performance by Clifton Webb, though Dana Andrews is exceptional and Gene Tierney lives up to both the build-up of Laura and the exclamation that the actress was the most beautiful woman in the world. This print is a solid transfer by Fox and worthy of the film's pedigree. If you've never seen this mystery, in which a detective investigating a murder falls in love with the woman that was killed, you're in for a treat.

*Die Hard* is a very fun movie that launched a franchise that has struggled ever since to maintain the standards it set. Bruce Willis is always fun but given the harsh reviews for the latest version, you're probably better off sticking with what you know. This Blu-ray set contains the first four films but don't be surprised if the only one you re-watch is the original.

I'm a big fan of the old movie serials that used to run for weeks and weeks before



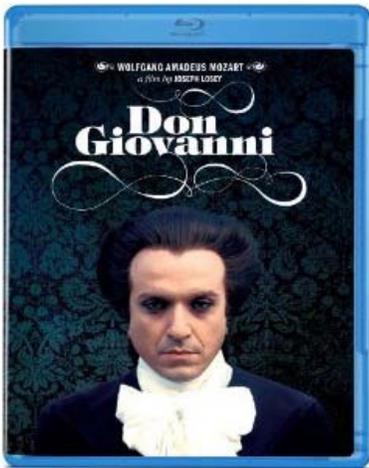
feature films, each episode about 10 or 15 minutes long and invariably ending with a cliffhanger. I always thought they should be packaged together in boxed sets at a bargain price and that's exactly what Image has finally done with the three Flash Gordon serials starring Buster Crabbe in *The Complete Adventures Of Flash Gordon*. You get all three complete serials on four discs, which run to more than 13 hours! Plus they're presented in a nice full color hardback set with a booklet that contains imagery from the original comic strips. It's a pity the booklet is glued to the case but this is an exemplary set at a terrific price. Fans of sci-fi and Flash Gordon in particular shouldn't hesitate. If you've got kids, it's really fun to dole them out rather than gobbling them up all at once. Bring on more serials!

Three reissues of flawed but notable movies round out this section: *Julius Caesar* features John Gielgud in this stiff 1970 version starring Charlton Heston. It pales compared to the Brando version from the 1953 but it's fascinating to see Gielgud assay the same role after 17 years have passed. *Don Giovanni* is an adaptation of the opera by Joseph Losey that is strictly for buffs. And *Les Miserables* has been filmed many, many times. This French version from 1958 stars the ideal casting of Jean Gabin as Jean Valjean, excellent casting but not an excellent film despite the Victor Hugo-like running time of 188 minutes.

*Photographic Memory* (\$27.95 DVD; First Run Features)

*Undefeated* (\$24.99 Blu-ray; Weinstein/Anchor Bay)

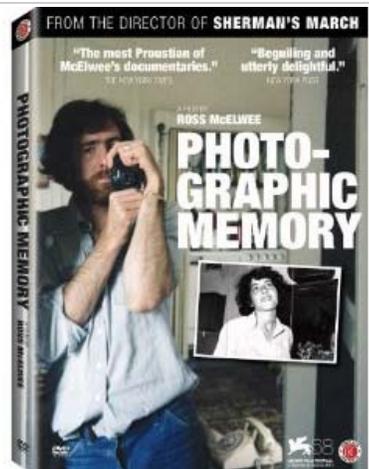
*Bully* (\$29.99 Blu-ray; Weinstein; Anchor Bay) -- Filmmaker Ross McElwee of the deeply personal *Sherman's March* felt a



little estranged from his son. So naturally he headed out and made another movie! *Photographic Memory*, the latest chapter in one of the more idiosyncratic careers in documentary filmmaking, shows McElwee heading back to Brittany to explore his own childhood.



*Undefeated* is the heartwarming, Oscar-winning film about high school football players and the volunteer coach who believed in them as players and as men. Like *Hoop Dreams*, but shorter and more sentimental.

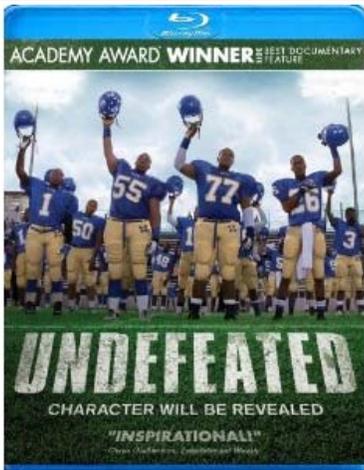


And *Bully* is the hard-to-argue-with documentary film that says bullying is wrong. Sure, but one can't help feeling the movie is preaching to the choir and isn't quite the game changer for those who actually do bully. Still, one can hope.

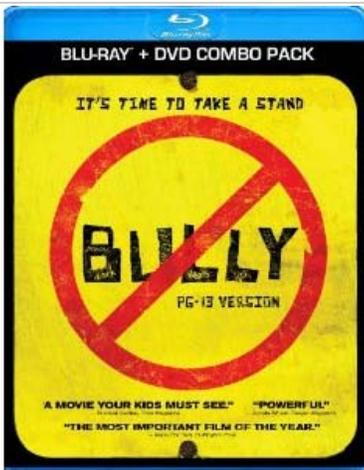
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