

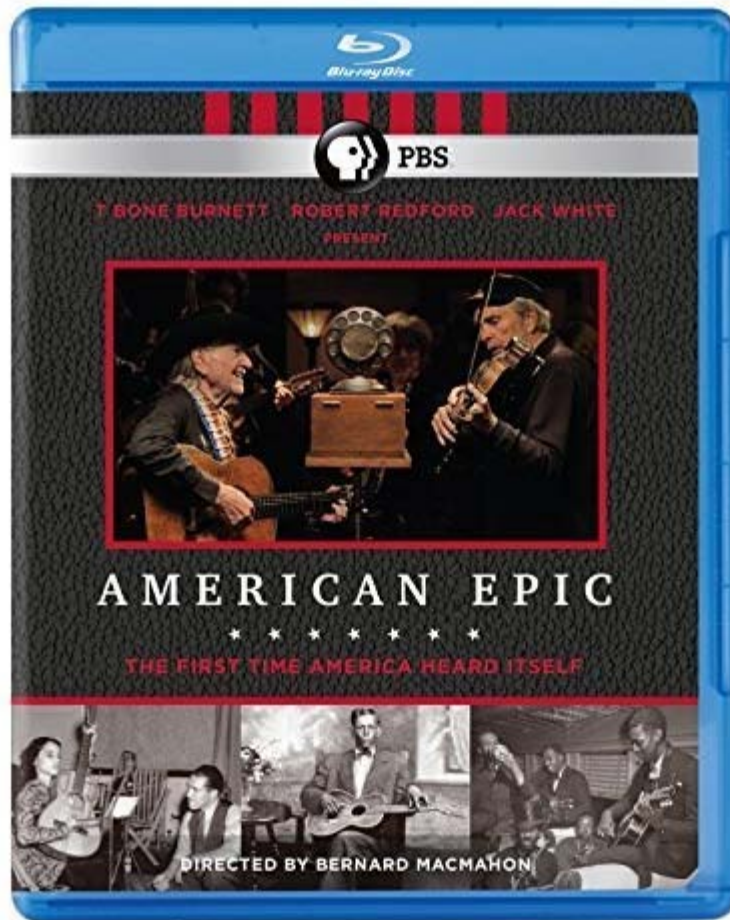


Michael Giltz, Contributor BookFilter creator

DVDs: TV Madness! Catch Up On "Mannix," Sinatra, "South Park," "The Young Pope" & Piles Of Boxed Sets!

06/14/2017 07:42 pm ET

It's too much! We know. We understand. Peak TV could break you. Not to fear. Just because there's more tv doesn't mean you have to watch it all. (Which really, it's impossible so don't even try. Trust us; we tried.) Thanks to technology, you can wait till the end of the night (DVR) or the end of the week (DVR/On-Demand), end of the season (Hulu, DVDs, on-demand) or even the end of the series to catch up on the shows everyone is talking about. Or the shows everyone is not talking about but which you wanna watch anyway. So here they are, ranging over the decades and ranging in quality. But ain't that always the way?



AMERICAN EPIC (\$34.99 BluRay; PBS)

This PBS miniseries sort of came and went without making the impact it deserved. Overseen by producer T-Bone Burnett, artist Jack White and filmmaker Robert Redford, this three part documentary shows how recorded music knitted the United States together. First, it allowed everyone across the nation to share the same popular hits. Second, it pushed record companies looking for new material and new markets to track down and preserve everything from fiddle music in the poorest regions of the country to chain gang songs from prison, finding a big audience for hillbilly and “race” music where none was expected before. It shows how the way music could be recorded influenced the type of music written and countless other fascinating tidbits. It’s woven into a tale bursting with music and climaxed by an all-star jam of sorts. The accompanying soundtrack includes newly restored numbers and current artists creating new songs using ancient technology. Great fun.



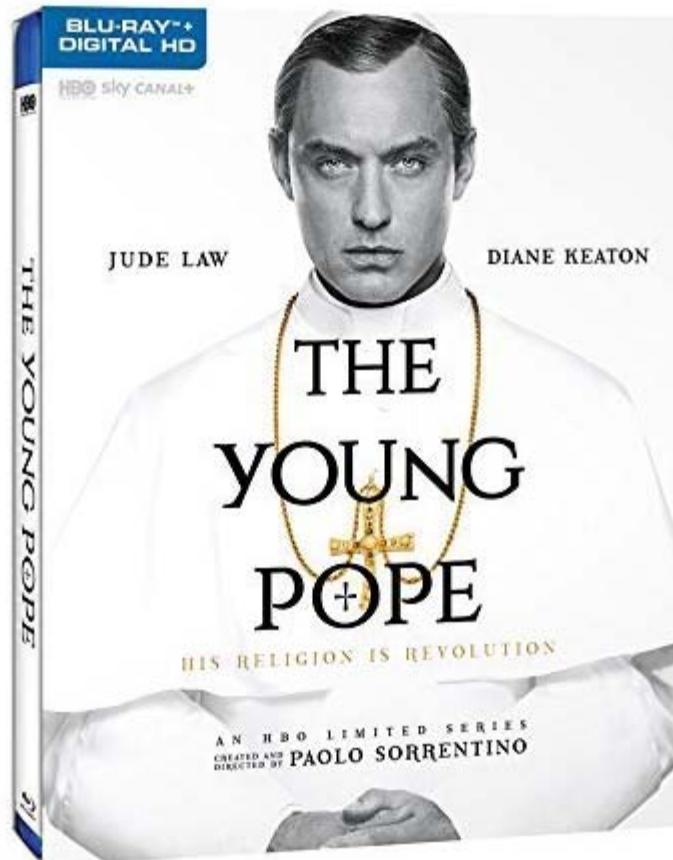
THE
Frank Sinatra
COLLECTION

THE TIMEX SHOWS VOL. 1
THE FRANK SINATRA TIMEX SHOW
AN AFTERNOON WITH FRANK SINATRA

THE FRANK SINATRA COLLECTION: THE TIMEX SHOWS VOL. 1 AND 2 (\$9.98 each DVD; Eagle Rock Entertainment)

Sticking with music, Frank Sinatra could be an indifferent performer. Not in concert, not really. And not in the recording studio, where he always labored to create enduring work and maintained a remarkable batting average over decades. But on the radio and TV? Sinatra didn't always take it seriously. Sometimes that meant he was rushed ill-at-ease and other times it meant he tossed off songs rarely if ever sung by him in any other context. This particular series sponsored by Timex has been available for years. These inexpensive editions are fine if you've never seen them before and are a fan. It's certainly not for beginners to Sinatra, but ardent listeners will enjoy combing through these performances to find those handful that are unique, such as his

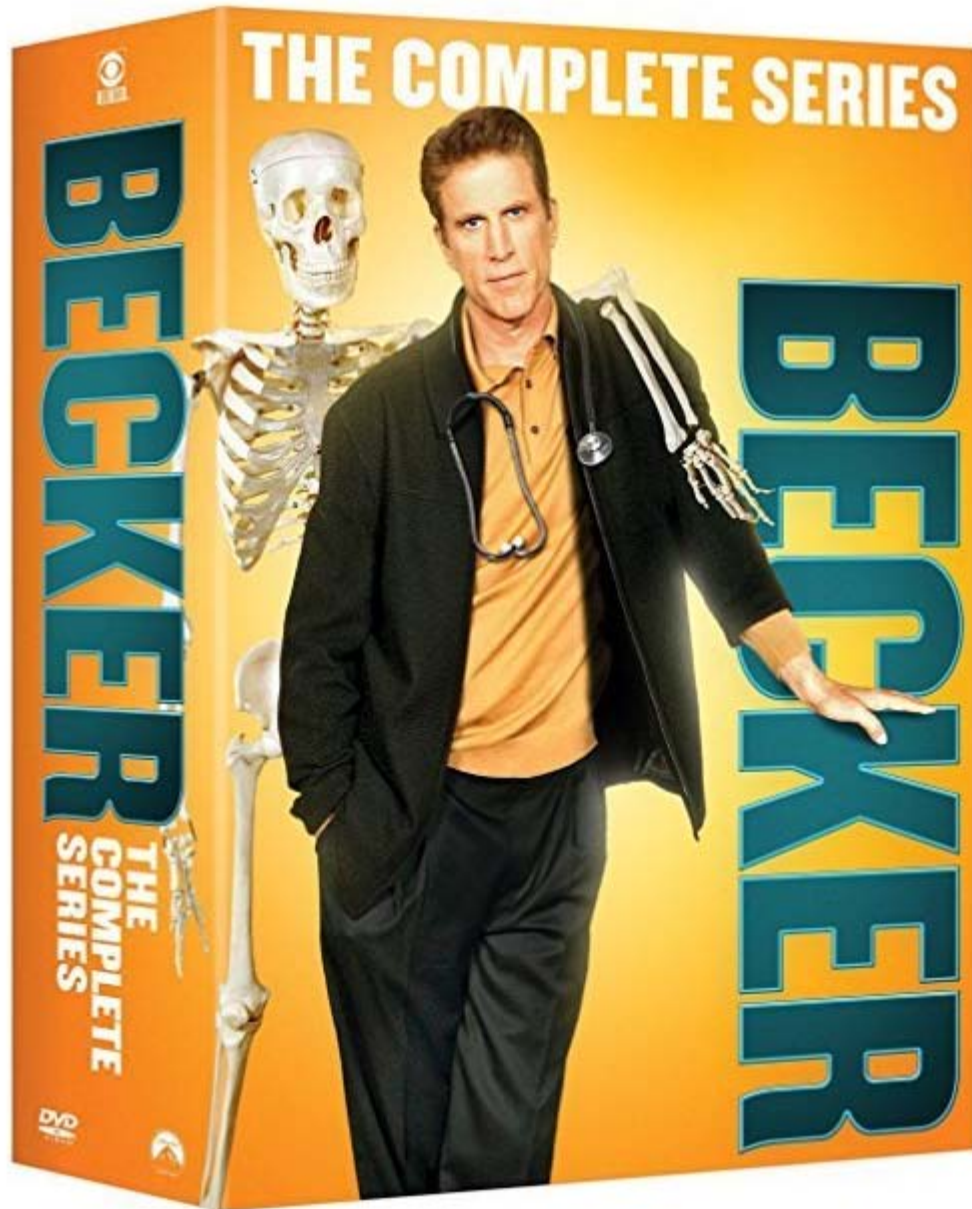
awkward pairing with Elvis Presley.



THE YOUNG POPE (\$59.99 BluRay; HBO)

The problem with the young Pope (Jude Law) is that he's not crazy enough. This left-field miniseries by the fine film director Paolo Sorrentino features a brash young American being named the new Pope, with the expectation that he'll be easily cowed and do as he's told. That's never worked out and sometimes matters have to be taken in hand by the Vatican bureaucracy. But Jude Law is no Pope John Paul; he's more likely to have outmaneuvered everyone else. Diane Keaton is his nun mentor/consigliere. The show feels rather tone deaf in its treatment of the bishops (the African bishops are especially patronized) but none of it is nearly as

much fun as you keep hoping it will be. No wonder season two will be a reboot with an entirely new Pope. Though heaven knows it will be a miracle if that makes a difference.

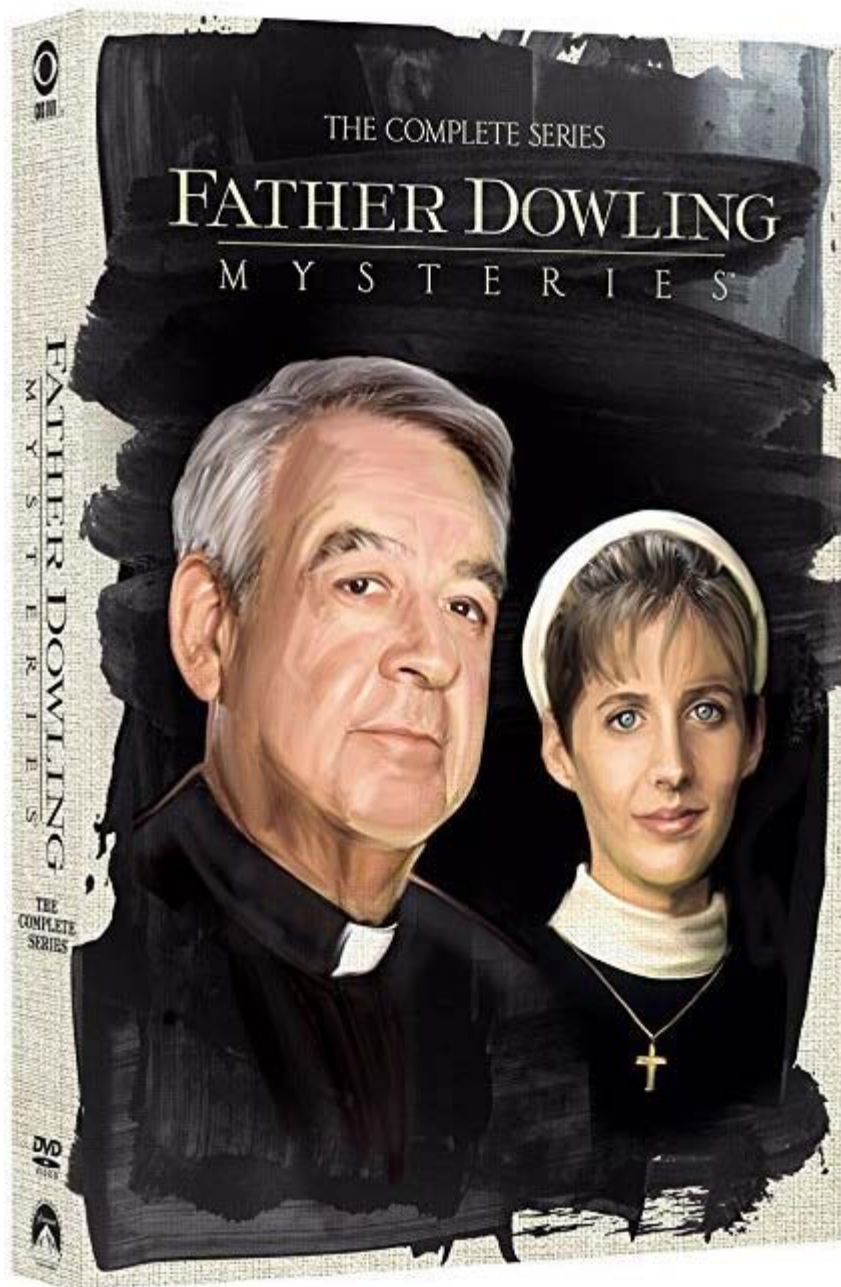


BECKER THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$55.98 DVD; Paramount)

TV loves grumpy old men. Sometimes they're genuinely grumpy old racists like Archie Bunker. More often, they're faux grumps, like Fred Sanford or Becker, played with caustic charm by Ted Danson. Oh sure he glowers a good glower but most every episode he'll do something to show the guy's not so tough after all. It was a time-slot hit following *Everybody Loves Raymond* (a far superior show that went on too long, as hit shows will). When they moved it away and dumped the gently simmering love interest (actress Terry Farrell) the ratings fell off a cliff and it never recovered. Still, there's a reason some actors becomes tv stars and

Danson's way with a one-liner make this pleasant company for the undemanding.





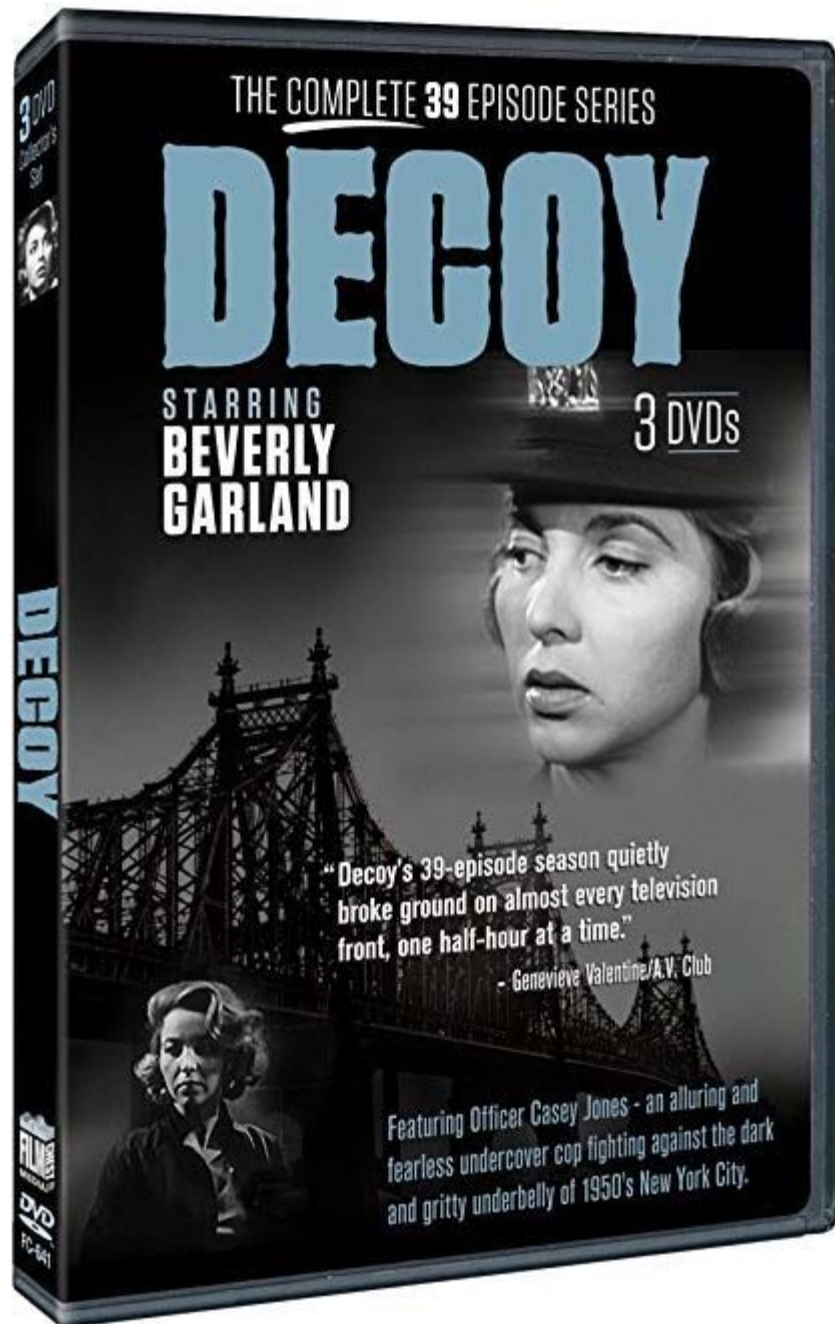
THE COMPLETE SERIES

Mannix



THE COMPLETE SERIES





THE STREETS OF SAN FRANCISCO COMPLETE SERIES (\$89.98 DVD; Paramount)

FATHER DOWLING MYSTERIES THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$22.99 DVD; Paramount)

MANNIX THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$129.99 DVD; Paramount)

DECOY THE COMPLETE 39 EPISODE COLLECTION (\$19.99 DVD; Film Chest)

I'm writing these reviews on my way out the door for a road trip from the South to San Francisco. Say that city's name and a few things pop into mind: Tales Of The City, the Tony Bennett song, Rice-A -Roni (the San Francisco treat!) and the cop show that trained Michael Douglas for stardom. The Streets Of San Francisco

really made the most of that city's visual panache and endless supply of eccentrics; those were often more memorable than the typical cases the duo of Michael Douglas and star Karl Malden tackled. Most memorable of all was the palpable chemistry between the two actors, who got along swimmingly. (After a lifetime of being the second banana, it was sweet to see Malden become a TV celebrity.) They remained friends even though Douglas bolted after the fourth season since he won the Oscar for producing *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* and soon became a big star. The show brought in Richard Hatch as a new partner but that plus a new time-slot killed it after one more season. This is meat and potatoes cop show stuff, but being filmed entirely on location gives this one an edge in interest.

Switch from San Francisco to Chicago and swap two detectives for a priest and a nun and you've got *Father Dowling Mysteries*. Starring Tom Bosley of *Happy Days*, it's one of the quietly nutty shows to air on tv. It began on NBC which cancelled the show after just eight episodes. One problem? All the mysteries were two-parters, so you might turn on the TV and find yourself utterly lost as to what was going on. (Not that the plots were that complicated; they usually let the audience know who was guilty early on.) Like *Jessica Fletcher*, you wouldn't want to invite Father Dowling to visit your parish. But ABC did, picking up the show for two more seasons. The mysteries became tighter in season two. Then someone drank too much of the communion wine for season three: they jumped from regular murder mysteries to sacred mysteries, with the devil and angels popping in as regular characters. All packed into a show that on the surface looked like a cozy mystery!

You can skip the first season of *Mannix*, which features a detective at an agency where the head honcho spies on his employees via cameras and demands everyone do as the computers suggest for each case. Needless to say, *Mannix* (the durable Mike Connors) would have none of that. The high-tech angle was dropped in season two with *Mannix* going on his own and the series soon hit its stride. *Mannix* has a very complicated backstory, being a prisoner of war tortured by the North Koreans, a gun runner and a college quarterback among other endeavors. Notably, his secretary (played with grace by Gail Fisher) was black, making Fisher one of the first African Americans with a regular role in primetime starting in 1968. She won an Emmy for her work. Like *Jim Rockford*, *Mannix* had the crap beaten out of him on a regular basis, though he was probably more upset when people messed with his sports car. *Mannix* the series peaked in the Top 10 in its fifth season, always seeming more interested in the people than the crime at hand, which is why it's a smidge better than the other routine detective shows of its era.

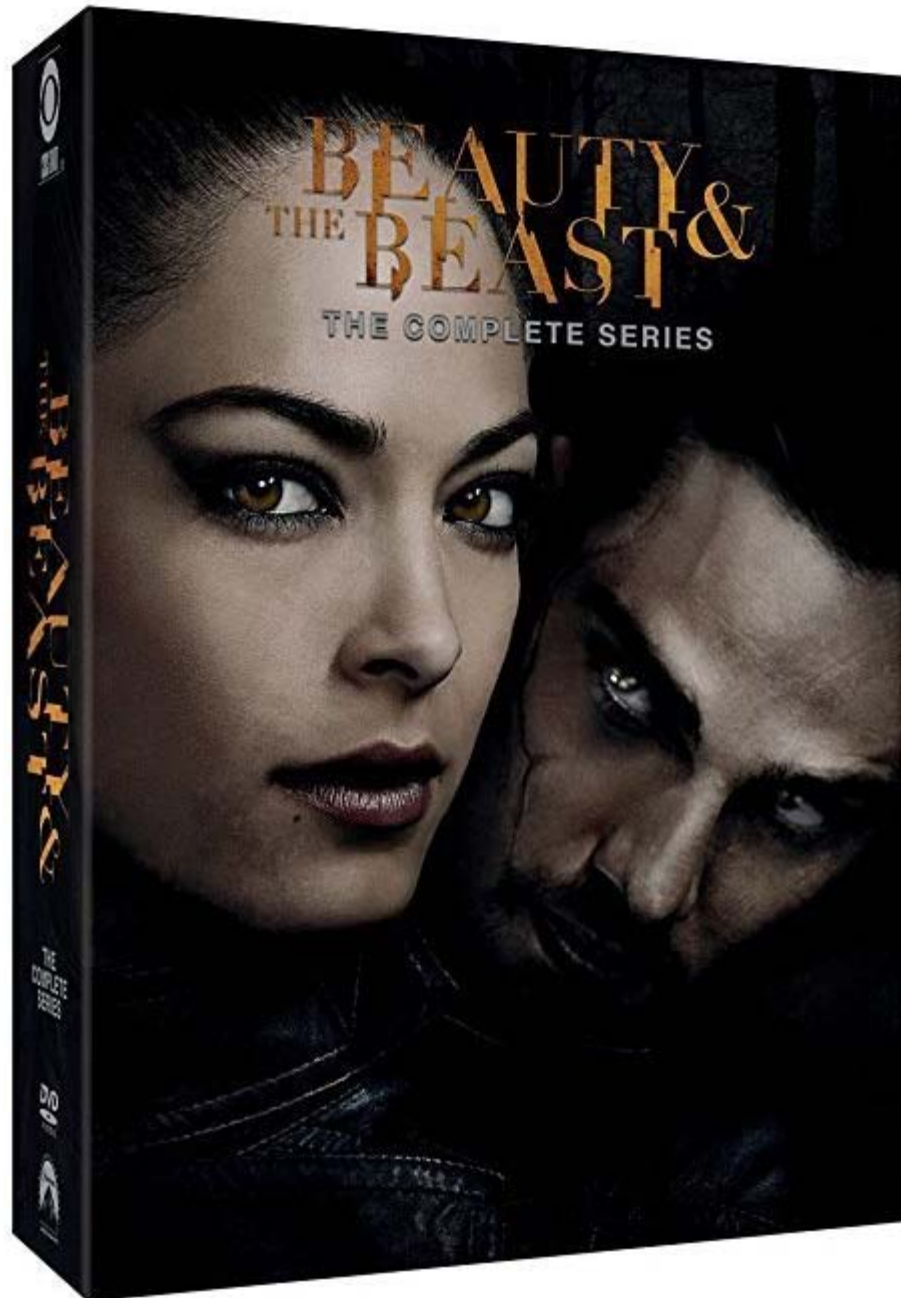
Another pathbreaker, *Decoy* is a 1957 cop show that was the first to focus on a female police officer. Beverly Garland starred as Casey Jones, a cop called upon to go undercover to solve crimes, usually involving crimes against women in some way. Purse snatching, assaults and the like played a prominent role. Interesting, each week played more like a stand-alone show, since the cast around Garland changed every week. She had no male authority figure looming over her each week and patting her on the back, which is pretty interesting. The individual stories aren't great, adapting the business-like manner of *Dragnet*. This isn't melodrama, just police work, ma'am, and they just deliver the facts. The mildly campy fun arrives at the end of the half hour episodes where Garland addresses the audience in a sort of PSA about the case she solved. It's more notable for the mere fact of its existence as a "first" than the actual episodes, but they're no better or worse than other of the era.



SOUTH PARK THE COMPLETE TWENTIETH SEASON (\$39.99 BluRay; Comedy Central)

When you are a winemaker, each season is different. When do the rains come and how often? Was it scorching hot early and balmy late? The other way around? These and a thousand other factors are what give each year's vintage their distinctive notes. The same is true for each mini-season of *South Park*. What's hitting the news cycle? Does it capture the fancy of Trey Parker and Matt Stone? Do they get stuck in the mistake of focusing on some passing moment or — more often — do they turn a blip on the pop culture chart into an enduring riff on greed or hypocrisy or whatever is suggested by the story they're riffing on? This season the Presidential election proved too irresistible to avoid, not that they wasted a lot of time with Trump jokes. Their net is usually cast wider. Parker and Stone often shake things up to keep themselves engaged and as with the

past few seasons, that has meant the ten episodes here tell one long story arc. It's not a vintage year, really, but if you drink it fast it still gives you a buzz.



BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (2012): THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$49.99 DVD; Paramount)

What's more mysterious, the Beast or the fact that this series was made and then somehow managed to survive four seasons despite poor ratings and terrible reviews? The original *Beauty and the Beast* TV series was a nutty, over-the-top romance with arty pretensions that made its fervent fans swoon. It also had Linda Hamilton and Ron Perlman. This sort-of remake drops most of the Shakespearean overtones and is grittier albeit with more girl power and less of an old-fashioned damsel in distress vibe. Unfortunately, they don't

really leave the show with any reason for being, despite a cover image that makes it look like some fearsome vampire-fest. The only memorable element was actress Nina Lisandrello in a supporting role as our heroine's fellow cop and best friend, a lone voice of sanity and good acting in a show that like many zombies simply refused to die. Sadly, this version lasted more seasons and made more episodes.



JOAN OF ARCADIA THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$36.99 DVD; Paramount)

Sometimes all you need is a good cast. This oddball drama has a teenage girl who is contacted by God; she fears she's going crazy but God insists she do certain tasks for her. Each week the tasks seem minor or not that important but prove to have a ripple effect for the people around Joan. Amber Tamblyn anchors the show nicely as Joan, but she's surrounded by excellent actors with good characters of their own including her parents (Joe Mantegna and Mary Steenburgen) and a very good Jason Ritter as her paraplegic brother. God comes in many forms, speaking to Joan in the guise of random folk popping up on the street. But given that Joan is a teen, it's no surprise God frequently took the guise of Cute Guy God (an appealing Kris Lemche). It hoped to tap into the spiritual audience tapped by *Touch By An Angel* but *Joan Of Arcadia* was far better than that programmer. Unfortunately, ratings were modest and when they dipped slightly in season two, the show was gone. The creators introduced the idea of a devilish tempter to shake things up, but it was too little too late. A shame, actually. *Joan of Arcadia* isn't an all-time great, but it's distinctive and different and very well acted. Check it out.

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