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DVDs: TV Show Boxed Set Rip-Offs

Posted June 25, 2008 | 03:26 PM (EST)



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I love collecting TV shows on DVD. Something that was wildly impractical on VHS (one season of a drama would take up a foot or more of shelf space) is now commonplace. Studios should be thrilled -- sales of old TV shows have gone from an insignificant sliver to a billion dollar business. People now buy TV episodes on iTunes and entire sets on DVD season by season and then sometimes buy the entire thing all over again in a complete boxed set.

But studios can't leave a good thing alone. it's like Blu-Ray: instead of just introducing this new format at the same price point with backward compatibility and keeping people happy and in the habit of spending \$16 billion a year on DVDs (about twice what is spent at the US box office), they use Blu-Ray as an excuse to raise prices dramatically. Because, really, when sales are slowing the smartest thing you can do is raise the price, not add value.

And now TV shows on DVD. A spreading practice needs to be stopped right now. A number of studios -- led by Paramount/CBS -- are releasing old TV shows in half-season sets. You can buy *The Streets of San Francisco Season 2 Volume 1* (\$39.98; Paramount) and *Jake and the Fatman Season One Volume One* (\$36.98; Paramount) -- as if anyone in the world has EVER wanted to buy half a season of a TV series. When the iconic show *Route 66's* first season came out in two parts last October and this February, I objected mightily but the people behind the set (a tiny company) insisted they had to put out the first half just to see if they could justify putting out the second half. The company was so small I relented a little. But now that they're releasing the first season in one set just four months after putting out the individual volumes, I'm sorry I did.

Other shows tease out their releases, but I can only blame instant gratification buyers for being suckered in. *Battlestar: Galactica* has its season spread out over a year with huge gaps in between,

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so I don't mind so much when they release the episodes already aired on DVD. Everyone knows the entire season will be made available in one set once they've all aired, so the choice is yours. Same with the animated series *Avatar The Last Airbender* (which M. Night Shymalan is turning into a live action film). Each season or "book" comes out in dribbles with five episode sets (such as *Book 3 Volume 3* out in May for \$16.99 from Nickelodeon) but if you wait the entire season comes out in one complete set. *Blood+ Volume Two* (\$24.96; Sony) (featuring the Adult Swim anime show) is taking a similar tack, putting out five episodes at a time which annoys me more than intrigues me.

And I know all the excuses: old shows like *Gunsmoke* had a lot more episodes each season. *Gunsmoke The Second Season Volume 2* (\$36.98; Paramount) has 19 half hour episodes, which is about the same as an entire season of most network shows today (and more than most cable series). But you know what? I don't care. *Gunsmoke* began airing in 1955 -- these episodes are more than 50 years old. And it ran for 20 years so they've got 600+ episodes to sell! Do you really expect people to buy roughly 40 boxed sets at \$36 each? More than \$700 to own one show? What's worse, they released the entire 39 episodes of season one for the same basic price as HALF of what season two will cost. How does this make sense? It doesn't. *Jake and the Fatman* and *Cannon* were journeyman shows at best -- do they really need to be doled out in this way (\$36.98 each; Paramount) for half of their first seasons? If 22 episodes of USA Network's modest hit series *The Big Easy* (\$49.98; MPI) can be made available in one set, so can the *Fatman*. I'm delighted the puppy dog cute Kyle Chandler (who came into his own on *Friday Night Lights*) can be seen in *Early Edition First Season* (\$49.99; Paramount). Now where's his earlier series *Homefront*?

New shows are no better sometimes. HBO has always charged a premium for its shows -- \$60 for 13 episodes of *The Sopranos* worked out to quite a premium. Then they bundled all the seasons together in a boxed set costing more than \$500. And coming in November, you can buy the entire series with soundtracks and extras for about \$400. That's the right direction to go in, but since everyone who loved the show has been buying it all along, frankly the 86 episodes should have been even cheaper.

Other big TV mistakes: releasing *The Cosby Show* -- one of the most popular sitcoms of all time -- with truncated episodes pulled from the syndication version rather than the original full-length episodes. (Other shows have done this as well.) Releasing some seasons of a show but not the rest -- where in God's name are seasons 5-7 of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, the greatest sitcom of all time?

Yes, cable shows have fewer episodes so maybe it's no surprise *The Closer Third Season* (\$39.98; Warner Bros.) and *Monk Season Six* (\$59.98; Universal) and *Eureka Season 2* (\$39.98; Universal) and *Psych Second Season* (\$59.98; Universal) are complete sets. (And no, there's no good reason for *Monk* and *Psych* to cost so much more than *Eureka* except that they're more popular.) But *Tyler Perry's House of Payne Volume Two* (\$29.98; Lions Gate) has 20 episodes, as much as any network sitcom and they're not holding back. Neither is *Walker Texas Ranger Fifth Season* (\$49.99; Paramount), the Chuck Norris hit that kickboxes its way into fans' home complete and ready to watch. The History Channel's *Dogfights Complete Second Season* (\$49.95; A&E) has 17 episodes as well.

What can you do about it? Don't buy 'em. Any show released in fragments is a show you should avoid like the plague. No matter how big a fan you are, don't let them double dip, as they'd say in *Seinfeld*. Shows that are 20, 30, or 40 years old don't deserve more of your money than a new series and as a viewer and buyer, you don't deserve any less than full seasons. If you don't buy them and DO support full and complete TV shows sold season by season, believe me, they'll stop making 'em.

NOTE: Some of the DVD sets mentioned are not out yet but will be released in the next few weeks.

Also out this week:

Glitterbox: Derek Jarman X 4 (\$74.99; Zeitgeist) -- A wonderful presentation of four major works by the boldly experimental director, including *Caravaggio* (an unconventional biopic) and *Blue* (which is literally a blue screen with voices and sounds ruminating on the color). Far from comprehensive (since it doesn't include major works like *Edward II*, *The Last Of England* or his music videos), this is a perfect introduction to a director whose stock will soar in years to come and made touching by a tribute film created by his friends after Jarman's death. Sure to be one of the best releases of the year.

"Washington Unplugged"

Arianna was on CBS' "Washington..."

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I'm a little embarrassed to love this show as much as...

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On Thursday's episode of "Mad Money" host Jim Cramer declared that the depression...

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Least Wasteful Cities In America (SLIDESHOW)

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The Furies (\$39.95; Criterion) -- a very fun 1950 Western with Barbara Stanwyck in great form as the willful daughter of a widowed ranch owner. When a man kisses Stanwyck with passion, she eyes him and says, "I hope you can chew what you just bit off," a hilarious and sexy and defiant line that encapsulates everything that made her a star in one brief moment. Director Anthony Mann made greater westerns (especially with Jimmy Stewart), but this has been overlooked too long. Criterion even includes a paperback of the book it's based on. They've also just put out *Death Of A Cyclist* (\$29.95; Criterion) by director Juan Antonio Bardem, the uncle of Javier.

Honeydripper (\$27.98; Screen Media) -- a solid if unsurprising entry from the dependable John Sayles about a juke joint needing a quick bit of financial salvation, with his usual talented cast and wide angle look at a community.

Definitely, Maybe (\$29.98; Universal)/**In Bruges** (\$29.98; Focus Features) -- He's still not picking good movies, but Ryan Reynolds is starting to become a decent onscreen presence. In old Hollywood, potential stars would get to make 10 or 20 or more movies to gain experience and find the style and format that worked for them. Maybe that's what we're seeing to a lesser degree from Reynolds -- he might just surprise us. Similarly, playwright Martin McDonagh may not have created a big stir with his film directorial debut, but there's enough offbeat charm to hope he gets more chances.

The Spiderwick Chronicles (\$34.98; Paramount) -- A fantasy film based on so-so books is elevated greatly by the presence of Freddie Highmore in dual roles. He really does seem like the current child actor destined to make the transition to adulthood a la Christian Bale.

10,000 BC (\$28.98; Warner Bros.) -- Fans of Westerns and musicals often feel neglected. But imagine if you were a fan of caveman movies -- they almost never get to see ANY movies in their favorite genre. Which is the only explanation I can think of for this having grossed \$270 million worldwide. *8,000 BC* anyone?

Papaya, Love Goddess of the Cannibals (\$29.95; Severin) A sexploitation flick starring Roger Vadim discovery Sirpa Lane. I happily quote the liner notes: "Severin Films is shamelessly proud to present...fully restored -- including the complete Disco Cannibal Blood Orgy sequence -- from an Italian vault print seized from the private collection of a jailed magistrate!" I doubt the film is as entertaining as those notes, but you never know.

Xanadu Magical Music Edition (\$19.98; Universal) -- a notorious flop -- and deservedly so -- starring Olivia Newton John and (god forgive him) Gene Kelly in his last movie. Strictly for lovers of the truly awful.

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Wow, I'm impressed. You get to watch a LOT of TV . . .

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bethace [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of bethace](#) [permalink](#)

If TV shows on DVD are such a huge money maker I wonder why I can't buy season 2 (or any subseuent seasons) of Everwood on DVD. Even if they only realeased part of it at a time, I'd gladly be ripped off.

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Ohhh this annoys me as well. It isn't like I am a huge TV show buyer anyway - I have to really get to silly obsessed over a show before i will buy it and that just doesn't happen that often.

But that Battlestar: Galactica thing. I didnt get what you were referring to because I still cannot find season 2 in one box, and since i refuse to spend that much money for half a season, I still don't have season 2. It would be different if they didn't want so much for the .5 season - we would spend 20buck maybe but not 33-40buck a pop? I don't think so.

When they put it out in one box for 40-50 buck, that would be when we will buy it, and not before.

And I don't even care about S4 at this point, I am so po'd about about the whole 1 year break - 10 eps, then another year break thing.

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Hey Michael: Have you ever done a buyer-beware post about my number-one DVD pet peeve: Replacing the pop songs on the soundtrack with generic Muzak because the production company will not or cannot acquire the rights to the original music?

It really burned me, after I spent a bundle on some "Odd Couple" seasons, to discover that scenes involving popular music have been altered or cut entirely. Deadly for a show that relied heavily on pop culture references. What a rip-off! I've heard that the DVD sets of "WKRP" are mere shadows of the original broadcast episodes, which derived so much of its flavor from the actual '70s hits the fictional station was playing.

But anyone willing to buy "Jake and the Fatman" in any form deserves to be hoodwinked.

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robiform [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of robiform](#) [permalink](#)

That's been a pet peeve of mine, too! Getting rights to original music is what caused the very long wait for "Miami Vice" (the series, not the movie!) on DVD. And if music rights can't be obtained, well you get the experience I had when watching the DVD of the first story arc of that memorable series "Wiseguy". The last episode was extremely memorable for many

reasons, one of them being the use of songs like "Nights in White Satin" by the Moody Blues. Unfortunately, the producers couldn't get the rights to "Nights in White Satin" and that blew the whole episode out of the water for me. Caveat emptor, indeed!

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I'm not disagreeing with you but I think it's for the following reasons:

- a) They know Netflix & Blockbuster cannot "wait" and will buy it anyway no matter the price - and while they won't actually make twice what they would've made by selling a single set, they can make maybe 30-40% more so ... why not.
- b) hardcore fans will pay anyway to be first on the block ...

Ultimately, months later - "average" fans will buy it when it hits below \$30-\$40 for a season set.

But as you point out, not only is it dumb to issue a truncated edited version, the shows where the original music gets stripped out is POINTLESS. It's hard to believe with 5 major studios who own most of the properties cannot work out deals with the music labels (many they own!) and instead try to foist shows on us with new music LIKE WE WOULDN'T NOTICE.

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And in other news:

Analysts say TV show downloading with bittorrent reaches recent new high.

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I'm already there with you. I own Seasons One and Two of "Dynasty," but refuse to buy the third. Why? Because CBS/Paramount (is anyone else detecting a trend here?) is releasing 12 episodes as "Season Three, Volume One."

The number of outraged pre-reviews of the set on Amazon.com indicate that the fan revolt is on. The majority have refused to buy anything but a full-season set.

If this is how CBS intends to handle future releases of other series, I am more than happy to continue profiting from my short position in the stock.

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