

DVDs: The Beatles, Ken Burns, Bob Newhart and More You Need

DVDs: The Beatles, Ken Burns, Bob Newhart and More You Need

Miss me? After some time off, here (finally!) are some new releases on DVD and BluRay and the best of recent months that you really need.

THE ROOSEVELTS: AN INTIMATE HISTORY (\$129.99 BluRay; PBS) -- Have you been taking director Ken Burns for granted? I have. It's been a while since I've been truly jazzed by one of his projects, however worthy and however sturdily made. But here we are again: the camera zooming in or pulling out on an old photograph, the well-considered voice-over, the expert talking heads who make history come alive. As the show aired on PBS, random friends and acquaintances kept telling me almost in surprise how captivated they were by this look at the one family that gives political dynasties a good name. It reached a peak with the section on Eleanor Roosevelt; everyone was reminded anew how fascinating she was. I was reminded anew of what a masterful filmmaker Burns has always been.

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Criterion)

RED RIVER (\$49.99 BluRay combo; Criterion) -- I've reviewed movies and TV shows on VHS tape, laser disc, DVD and now BluRay. One constant has always been the Criterion label, a sign of unquestioned quality and the innovator in elaborate boxed sets and commentary and other extras that have become commonplace for the most pedestrian works. Of course, when Criterion does it they do it right and it's almost always a movie worth your time. Anyone who didn't get to see *A Hard Day's Night* when it was reissued in movie theaters a few months ago should jump on this set. Or maybe the current tributes to George Harrison centered around his new boxed set have sparked your interest. Happily, *A Hard Day's Night* is not a curio or time capsule or just a document of a great band at the peak of its powers. It's a brash, bold work of art that astonishes even now, even though it has been so influential that you've seen everything here a thousand times before any time you watch a music video or backstage concert film. It's just so much better here, including the fact that the band had created an album that's so remarkably good. And the extras are almost absurdly copious, including multiple documentaries and shorts. The classic western *Red River* is restrained only in comparison. It's a rousing gem, one of the perfect films to show people who think they'll never like a John Wayne film. He's terrific here and the contrast between old school Wayne and the magnetic Montgomery Clift is a thrill all its own. This is the movie that was playing the final night of the movie house in *The Last Picture Show*. That film's director Peter Bogdanovich is all over this set, along with commentaries and other extras including a paperback edition of the novel it's based on. Criterion never disappoints.

THE BOB NEWHART SHOW COMPLETE COLLECTION (\$129.99 DVD; Shout! Factory)

WELCOME BACK KOTTER COMPLETE COLLECTION (\$129.99 DVD; Shout! Factory) -- The floodgates are opening on classic TV shows and they're doing it right. Instead of dribbling out single season sets, studios are finally giving fans what they want: complete boxed sets. Of course, it's only happening now because the DVD market is slipping away and studios know it's now or never. Luckily, boutique labels like Shout! Factory are here to do it right. They follow in the wake of pioneers like Criterion and present their offerings with care. I was most excited by *The Bob Newhart Show*, the 1970s gem I've always had a fond spot for. Watching the series all at once however is a very different experience instead of week after week. Like *The Barney Miller Show*, I've reluctantly had to downgrade it from one of the absolute best to a very good sitcom. Don't get me wrong: it's far

better than most sitcoms in history and Newhart remains an absolute delight. But week to week, it doesn't have quite the growth or inventiveness to mark it out. And to be sure, so many more shows have come out since then that it's quite naturally slipped a little lower on the list. I'll take it any day over Newhart, his very successful series that followed. And any scene with Newhart on the phone is a masterclass in comedy. I don't have to downgrade Welcome Back Kotter because even as a kid I knew it was pretty thin stuff. Watching it now, it's kind of amazing the show was such a phenomenon. Like Happy Days and others, it had adults in their 20s pretending to be kids in high school, a weird situation in retrospect. The humor is banal in the extreme and barely tolerable. The saving grace is comic Gabe Kaplan (and that theme song). Just like all those years ago, I looked forward to his long stories about relatives and the way his sexy, understanding wife (Marcia Strassman) would smile and sit back and enjoy whenever Kaplan broke into one of his monologues. Both sets have enough care and attention lavished on them to keep fans happy indeed.

HALLOWEEN THE COMPLETE COLLECTION BLURAY DELUXE (\$169.99 BluRay; Anchor Bay) -- Do you see a theme here? Fans are finally getting what they want -- definitive boxed sets that pull together all (or almost all) of the various cuts and extras that have proliferated over the years, especially with a franchise like Halloween that has bounced around numerous studios. Fanatics will welcome various permutations like a cut made for TV of one edition and a producer's cut of another and so on. I appreciate their now rare decision to give each film its own case. I'll take that over the folding cardboard monsters that most multi-disc sets seem to inspire. While I don't have enough older versions to do a thorough comparison, the original film by director John Carpenter looks and sounds terrific and still creeps you out. Impressively thorough.

THE LAST OF THE UNJUST (\$39.98 BluRay; Cohen Media Group) -- Director Claude Lanzmann's documentary Shoah is one of the towering works of art. It's no wonder Lanzmann has spent the rest of his career returning again and again to the work of his masterpiece, turning this and that section about the Holocaust into stand-alone works. Here we have a Lanzmann's penetrating look at the last leader of the Jews at a vile "model ghetto" set up by the Nazis. The situation is remarkably complex, as one might imagine, and I have friends and scholars of the Holocaust who think at the end Lanzmann swallowed whole a highly questionable act. [My full review can be found here](#). Suffice to say that it's very compelling and at least let's this leader make his case in full. You can debate it, you can wonder what you might have done under the circumstances and for the sake of history we have his side of the story. For me, it was easily one of the best films of 2013.

LOCKE (\$24.99 BluRay; Lionsgate) -- An entire film set in a car? It's a stunt but the best sort of stunt. The story follows Locke as he spends 80 minutes in his car heading to a hospital for the birth of his childhood by an ex-lover. When not addressing the ghost of his father, Locke is juggling phone calls about medical emergencies, rather curious ones from his wife (where exactly is he going?) and frantic messages from work that he has abandoned. It's compelling and fascinating as much for the constraints the film places on itself as for the story itself. Best of all, it got me to give new respect to actor Tom Hardy, who has been in any number of films but never truly impressed me till now.

BILL MORRISON: THE COLLECTED WORKS 1996-2013 (\$44.98 DVD; Icarus) -- For me, the most shocking detail about this boxed set is the price: \$45 (and less if on sale) for all these shorts and movies by one of the best directors working today? No wonder the first shipments seem to have sold out immediately. ([It's available directly from Icarus.](#)) Morrison is an experimental, envelope-pushing filmmaker but that might lead you to believe he's an acquired taste. Yet his movies are hypnotic and fascinating for everyone from lovers of esoterica to casual filmgoers. His masterpiece will probably always be Decasia, a film composed of snippets of decaying film stock that have been woven together into a hymn to the past, a celebration of life enduring against all odds and about a million other things. But I also love The Miner's Hymns and The Great Flood and can't wait to dive into more of the shorts and other works of his I haven't seen yet or in a long time. Time and again, Morrison takes found footage, edits it together brilliantly, draws out a brilliant score to pair it with and the result is deeply moving and elegiac.

TWIN PEAKS: THE ENTIRE MYSTERY (\$134.99 BluRay; Paramount) -- Perhaps the nuttiest thing about Twin Peaks is that this landmark TV show has NEVER been readily available on home video or DVD or BluRay or streaming online or in syndication...until now. Sure, you could purchase this or that Japanese edition to fill in certain gaps. But even previous boxed sets have at the least lacked the brilliant two hour pilot that launched this enduring phenomenon. Now you get everything, including the feature film, various permutations and enough bonus features to keep fans busy for hours. Best of all, you get the show itself, looking and sounding better than ever. Since Twin Peaks may be the most influential TV show in history in terms of visuals and sound, that's no small thing. [You can read my celebration of the show for the Los Angeles Times here.](#) I'd have to write a book to tell you all the ideas that just watching an episode or two sparked in me. Like many, I'd suggest watching the show as a miniseries: screen the first 17 episodes, take a break and when enough time has passed that you won't spoil the original story arc, you can watch the rest of the episodes, the movie prequel and the extras as much as you want. Three more thoughts strike me as I watch it again and share it with a friend who never saw so much as a single scene of the show before. One, it's truly a soap opera with cliffhanging episodes and a relentless pleasure in teasing out information. Two, the casting of the young women was uniformly excellent while the casting of the young men is weak from top to bottom. Curious but true. Three, Kyle MacLachlan has done a lot of great work, but boy is he terrific here.

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the founder and CEO of [BookFilter](#), a book lover's best friend. It's a website that lets you browse for books online the way you do in a physical bookstore, provides comprehensive info on new releases every week in every category and offers passionate personal recommendations every step of the way. It's like a fall book preview or holiday gift guide -- but every week in every category. He's also the cohost of [Showbiz Sandbox](#), a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's [available](#) for free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his [website](#) and his [daily blog](#).

Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs and Blu-rays with the understanding that he would be considering them for review. Generally, he does not guarantee to review and he receives far more titles than he can cover.