

DVDs: The Greatest Road Trip Movie of All, Loads of Boxed Sets for Gift-Giving and More

DVDs: The Greatest Road Trip Movie of All, Loads of Boxed Sets for Gift-Giving and More

Here's a rundown of some new releases in the last two weeks, many of them perfect for last minute gift ideas. A few days ago, I also covered more than 20 boxed sets and single season offerings of TV shows and movies. Check out my [BOXED SET BONANZA article for more great gift ideas](#) (or a treat for yourself -- after all that shopping, you deserve it!). The complete Poirot, the complete Pee-wee's Playhouse, the complete Matt Smith years of Doctor Who, the complete WKRP In Cincinnati (finally!) and much more are there. But onto the new releases!

IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON 75th ANNIVERSARY (\$19.99 BluRay; Sony)

THE CONFORMIST (\$29.95 BluRay ONLY (not really); Raro Video)

TIME BANDITS (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

Why do I lavish so much more attention on "older" movies rather than new releases? Well, duh -- because they're so much better. Answer me this: why do so many people waste time just streaming and renting and buying any ole new release whose title rings a bell (because it was advertised over and over) rather than watching a classic film? You know most new releases will be just ok, at best. You know most classics are classics because they're really really good! So enough! If you enjoy the genres these films come from, you owe it to yourself to watch them today.

It Happened One Night is the original, the prototypical road trip movie in which a mismatched couple fights and falls in love. They did it here first, to massive acclaim and Oscar success and boy does it stand the test of time. Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert are a treat as a tough talking newspaper man out for a scoop and a spoiled heiress running away from home. It was a hit during the last Depression and it's just as fun to watch during this one. No one presents classic films with more care than Criterion. It looks great, of course, and the extras include a feature length documentary on director Frank Capra, a restored version of his first short, and much more. This isn't homework. It's fun. If you liked The Sure Thing with John Cusack, this is the film they were following in the footsteps of (or should that be tire tracks?). Wait, you haven't seen The Sure Thing either? I give up!

Romance is an enduring theme in movies and so are corrupt politicians. They are always blooming too, at least in DC. The best thing about 2014 was that it was the 75th anniversary of 1939, giving a bunch of studios an excuse to put out new editions of a clutch of masterpieces. Even in that vintage year, Mr. Smith Goes To Washington stands tall. It manages to be cynical and optimistic at the same time, no small feat. Jimmy Stewart is genuinely inspiring as a regular guy who tries to do good (Barack Obama probably watches this flick to cheer himself up) and Jean Arthur is every bit as good as the hardened politico who softens her heart for him. And what a finale! This restoration looks stunning, by the way and also includes new interviews about the film and a documentary.

Bernardo Bertolucci made many significant films. But I don't think any of them looked more beautiful than the gorgeous masterpiece The Conformist. Jean-Louis Trintignant is remarkable as a man compromised into terrible

deeds by the corrupt world he lives in. Do the visuals overwhelm this dark tale? No, they underline and mock and make clear the constantly alluring temptation to just go along. This restoration also looks terrific. It is available on DVD, but I'll never speak to you again if you don't watch it on BluRay.

Enough with the heavy fare! Director Terry Gilliam was already in the pantheon for being a part of Monty Python's Flying Circus. But this charming solo debut married the daft sensibility of that troupe with the dangerous charm of a fairy tale. *Time Bandits* is a trippy, positively head-spinning look at a child who goes traipsing through time, from Robin Hood to the Titanic to ancient Greece and into a final battle against the Supreme Being. (Not in that order.) While fans of Python should be first in line (and have already seen it, I'm sure), this is Gilliam's most broadly appealing film. Now the folks at Criterion are only human and have once in a great while been tripped up by circumstances. Nobody's perfect! They once released a version of this film on DVD that was not up to their standards. Well, they've more than made up for that here with this spotless edition that takes me back to my first experience with this film in the movie theater. All is forgiven!

Classics aren't just noble fare or meta adventures, either. Sometimes they're just downright spooky. Check out the silent masterpiece *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, a German creepfest about a traveling circus and a sleepwalker who is apparently up to no good in the night. You realize how timidly realistic most movies are today when you see this: it employs highly stylized sets, costumes and makeup that leap into your imagination with creepy ease. Again, this restoration is terrific; the combination of BluRay with 4-K restoration and the care dedicated companies now pay to their movies (because people will kvetch if they don't) mean we're seeing many movies in better shape than they've been since their premiere, if ever.

THE JEFFERSONS COMPLETE SERIES (\$229.99 DVD; Shout)

MR. ED THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$139.99 DVD; Shout)

JEEVES AND WOOSTER COMPLETE COLLECTION (\$59.99 DVD; Acorn)

The boxed sets keep coming! Sitcoms tend not to play as well in big gulps the way serialized dramas do. But before all movies and TV shows enter the cloud and become available in a constant stream forever, it's nice to collect and make a statement about the shows you love or just really want to be able to watch without having to figure out where they're streaming and when a particular season is in rotation.

I grew up with *The Jeffersons*. Long before *The Cosby Show*, this Norman Lear produced comedy showed an affluent African American family happily ensconced on the Upper East Side. Yes, rather than being matter of fact like *Cosby's* set-up, the mere fact that they were movin' on up was the *raison d'etre* for this show. (Heck, it's even in the theme song.) But that lasted for about two minutes. They pushed buttons over mixed race couples and clash of cultures all the time. But George Jefferson was a smart, hard-working businessman who enjoyed his power and privilege, his wife Louise had the gracious manner of a hostess (without forgetting her roots) and Mother Jefferson sure liked her medicinal drinks, just like the Queen Mother at the time. They had a servant and she may have had a sharp tongue, but servant she was. None of this would matter except the show had a very strong ensemble of actors, led by Sherman Hemsley, Isabel Sanford and Marla Gibbs. I would have sworn up and down Gibbs had won an Emmy, but only Sanford did, in a rare but well-deserved win for an actress of color. They all elevated the rather pedestrian scripts the show eventually sank into once it ran out of steam on race/class/culture jokes. It was a smash hit on the premiere CBS lineup of Saturday night and then fell hard once it was jerked around the schedule, before climbing back into the Top 10 once it was ensconced on Sundays. And then they moved it again and pulled the plug unceremoniously after 11 seasons without a proper goodbye. No one would make that mistake today and why CBS didn't make amends and score ratings by reuniting them for a farewell special is beyond me. But you can celebrate this significant if not great show by diving into this set. And if your back seizes up after sitting and watching so many episodes, I'd be glad to walk on it for you. I am British, after all.

Mr. Ed is really nonsense, one of those silly shows that makes you just shake your head. It lasted for 143

episodes? Really? Interestingly, it's one of the few shows to leap from syndication into primetime on a major network. The concept was based on stories by Walter R. Brooks, more fondly remembered for the Freddy The Pig books, though this was where the money was at the time. The horse talked, the human Wilbur listened and audiences laughed. It certainly didn't hurt that the show boasted one of the catchiest theme songs in history. (See, you're singing it now.) Presumably only people who grew up with the show or its reruns will be interested. But here's the entire show presented with care by Shout. (And no, they didn't use peanut butter to make the horse move its mouth; it was prompted to at first and then just learned what was needed and did it. That's even more remarkable to me.)

For a comedy show that has in fact endured and looks better with each passing year, check out Jeeves & Wooster. If you only know Hugh Laurie from House, you'll be astonished at how well he plays a dimwit. If you only know Stephen Fry from whatever one of his many wonderful ventures you know Stephen Fry, well you'll fall in love with him again as the unflappable Jeeves. The tales by PG Wodehouse are wonderfully silly and this series is the ideal presentation of them. To be honest, earlier editions of this series on DVD have looked merely ok. Now it's done right.

AMERICAN MASTERS: BING CROSBY -- REDISCOVERED (\$24.99 DVD; PBS)

You can argue till you're blue in the face about the most talented performer in history. (It often comes down to a battle royal between Judy Garland and Sammy Davis Jr. -- those two could do it all!) But when it comes to the biggest star of all time, I've always argued for Bing Crosby. No one has ever dominated the way he did in so many different arenas at one time. Bing was for a number of years the biggest movie star in the world (and an Oscar winner to boot). Going My Way is a classic and the Road movies with Bob Hope remain an indelible and unique contribution (and very funny). Bing was also the biggest radio star in the world, which is akin to having the #1 TV show today. Bing was ALSO the most successful recording artist of all time, by many standards. His list of #1 records stretching out over decades and decades, the voice behind the biggest single of all time ("White Christmas," perhaps supplanted in sales but not in enduring popularity) and easily one of the most influential singers of them all -- his legacy is unquestioned. Bing also delivered a string of highly rated TV specials (though never with the regularity or impact of Hope). So consider me astonished that anyone would ever suggest Bing Crosby was in danger of being forgotten. Heck, I even had a screenplay about a young man obsessed with Crosby who would get in a fight with anyone that suggested Frank Sinatra was a better singer. (Shockingly, it was never optioned.) This American Masters special reintroduces us to Crosby and does a solid job of explaining just how massively successful he was in his day. They also go to the experts like Gary Giddins and Michael Feinstein to explain what a remarkable talent he was as a singer (the area where his true artistry lies). Toss in his innovations like pre-recording a radio show and how that led to new recording techniques and eventually the cassette and you've got a fascinating tale. I found this American Masters documentary to be merely so-so. Being a return visit to Crosby, I was looking for some genuine new insight rather than a run-down of the usual facts. They might have done better to focus in strictly on his singing and recording career, since that's the work that really matters. But for those who know little or nothing about Crosby, this does a decent task of detailing the remarkable career of one of the giants of pop culture. And then you can dive into some of his great music and realize how amazing he truly is.

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY (\$39.99 BluRay 3-D multipack; Disney)

THE 100 FOOT JOURNEY (\$36.99 BluRay; Disney)

NYMPHOMANIAC DIRECTOR'S CUT I AND II (\$39.98 BluRay; Magnolia)

OK, you need a gift? This grab-bag of titles is sure to include something that will appeal to 90% of the adults on your list. Remember, it's not about what you like, it's about what they will like. Guardians of the Galaxy is a loopy, fun comic book romp of a movie. It has the same appeal as the late, beloved TV series Firefly (but isn't remotely in that category of goodness). I have every confidence the sequel will be much better, but this is pretty

fun to begin with. And it has an awesomely odd, mixtape of a soundtrack to boot. Teens, adults who love sci-fi, comic book fanatics (they're not just males, you know) will all be happy. The 100 Foot Journey is also a problematic movie. But it's dependably sweet and sure to appeal to any fans of Helen Mirren or cooking shows. That should cover pretty much anyone over 50 years old. And if you need something dark and edgy, why not shock or amuse someone with Nymphomaniac? No, it's not suitable for sharing with the family on Christmas Day but it will be a showstopper of a stocking stuffer. And you can debate which actor would need the biggest stocking, given its explicit nature. The movie is a lot talkier and funnier and at least attempts something deep. Someone on your list think they're arty? Give 'em this and see what happens. Because sometimes it's not what they want, it's what you want to see them open.

LOONEY TUNES PLATINUM COLLECTION VOL. 3 (\$44.98 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE (\$36.99 BluRay combo; Disney)

THE WIND RISES (\$36.99 BluRay combo; Disney)

I know some people say they don't like "cartoons." Truly! I don't trust or like such people and you should keep them out of your life if at all possible. Whether it's classic shorts, overseas gems or new boundary pushing works, animation is a source of endless pleasure to me. The Looney Tunes shorts, led by Bugs Bunny of course, emblazoned on the minds of most kids how very funny, mature, adult and just plain silly cartoons could be. This third BluRay set contains one disc devoted to Bugs and another disc devoted to various and sundry talents. You'll find dependable fun here, though of course this stuff has been packaged and repackaged many times. Look elsewhere for more definitive collections of the greatest hits. But if you're a fan and want to add variety to your collection, this is a fine addition. Director Hayao Miyazakis is of course a master of animation. Kiki's Delivery Service is one of his gems that was created before most people in the West realized what a genius was in our midst. So you probably haven't seen this tale of a young girl who sets out in the world to prove her independence and become accepted as a full-fledged witch. It's a delight. Miyazaki's probable swan song as a director is The Wind Rises. This is more of a film for adults (though there's nothing shocking or explicit that teens and younger kids can't handle.) It's a classic melodrama about a young engineer who loves engineering machines but finds himself creating airplanes to help in the destructive battles of World War II. It just happens to be animated but could easily have been live action. Mind you, Miyazaki takes full advantage of the medium. An earthquake is a showstopper and the scenes of flight both real and imagined are breathtakingly beautiful. Its visuals tie directly into the themes that have threaded through all his movies from the start. Far from jingoistic, it's rather sad and beautifully muted, from the gorgeous artwork to the inevitable pop ballad over the closing credits.

PORTRAIT OF JASON (\$39.95 BluRay; Milestone)

ORNETTE: MADE IN AMERICA (\$39.95 BluRay; Milestone)

Can someone please tell the late director Shirley Clarke that we're finally catching up with her artistry? These two releases debuting on BluRay are just the tip of the iceberg for this talented trailblazer. But they're also essential works in both musical films and independent cinema. Clarke toyed with the limitations and strengths of cinema verite throughout her career. But she never did so more successfully than with Portrait Of Jason, a look at the most invisible person one could imagine in 1966: a black, gay, male prostitute in the West Village of New York City back when being gay was illegal. Jason holds forth in an interview/performance that is both confessional and over-the-top, truthful and fanciful in fascinating ways. It's a landmark work with loads of interesting extras, like further snippets of Jason including Jason in color (!) and even a complete audio recording of his Christmas album, which is surely for fanatics only.

Near the end of her career, Clarke also made an impressionistic film about the jazz legend Ornette Coleman. This has everything: found footage, interviews, reenactments of his life, and dazzling concert footage -- all of it edited with bebop fervor. It's mesmerizing, especially for fans of jazz. There's much more to come on BluRay

from this Academy Award winning director (for a documentary about Robert Frost I've never seen). But these two films are a great start.

THE ANGELS' SHARE (\$24.98 DVD; MPI)

LEVITATED MASS (\$27.95 DVD out 12-16; First Run)

Ken Loach has just about ended his career as a director of fictional films. (He's still got some unfinished business in documentaries apparently.) One of his last works proves one of his larkiest. The Angels' Share is a caper film about a group of misfits who plan to steal the "angels' share" of some wildly expensive whiskey about to be auctioned off. It's the perfect crime because the angels' share is the portion of whiskey that evaporates while it's been aged, so no one will miss a few extra pints, right? Loach maintains his unblinking eye on outcasts and the working poor, but never loses his grim sense of humor and empathy for life, however hardscrabble. It's far from one of his best but it's sweet and -- for this old puss -- a bit of a surprise.

Finally, Levitated Mass doesn't come out till next week (12-16) but since it's a real gem, it's worth mentioning now in the last regular column of the year. (I'll have a best of the year column soon.) Tragically, it didn't make the short list of documentaries eligible for the Oscar last year, but it definitely has the critical acclaim deserving of one of the best films of the year. Director Doug Pray tells of the amusingly drawn-out 40+ years it took to install a piece of artwork by Michael Heizer. Since that artwork involved a 300+ ton granite boulder traveling more than 100 miles and then being installed in mid-air where visitors could walk under and around it, that's perhaps not such a surprise. I love large works like this ([head to Dia Beacon in New York State](#) if you ever can; most museums can't even accommodate such works while Dia specializes in them). But I never gave much thought to how those pieces actually get into place. Levitated Mass uses that tale to explore the idea of what is artwork, the career of a fascinating artist and the almost comical journey of a really big rock.

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.