

# DVDs: "The Nanny," "The Fugitive," "MacGyver" -- It's A Boxed Set Feeding Frenzy!

## **DVDs: "The Nanny," "The Fugitive," "MacGyver" -- It's A Boxed Set Feeding Frenzy!**

TV fans should be in hog heaven. Major studios have realized the era of people building libraries of BluRays and DVDs is fading fast now that more and more TV is available for streaming, more TV than anyone could ever watch. But I still love having a library of my favorite books and movies and albums and TV shows. Happily, studios are finally giving us inexpensive no-frills boxed sets of our favorite shows. So dig in with a round-up of some recent TV sets, as well as the best of all the other current releases.

**THE NANNY: THE COMPLETE SERIES**

**THE FUGITIVE: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION**

**RAWHIDE: THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$162.99 DVD; Paramount)

**CHEERS: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION**

**THE SAINT: THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$199.98 DVD; Timeless Media)

**MACGYVER: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION**

**WALKER, TEXAS RANGER: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION** (\$119.98 DVD; Paramount)

**THE COLBYS: THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$119 DVD; Shout Factory)

The Nanny is the choice boxed set of the bunch, in part because it's presented with care and in part because it's not just repackaged and at a lower price like so many of the fine shows below, but the first complete boxed set of the show. Fran Drescher's sitcom is thoroughly familiar -- brassy nanny wakes up the stuffy rich folk and with common sense and a Queens accent. She teaches them to enjoy life in an Auntie Mame sort of way, if Auntie Mame fell for her boss, that is. Despite a so-so setup and some dated elements, it's enlivened by a sly wit that pops up every now and then, mostly due to channeling Drescher's smart sensibility. The Nanny also has a real love of Broadway and the occasional cameos from theatrical stars are a real treat. It would be nothing without Drescher though the rest of the cast is amiable too and gets better as it goes along. Shout has presented the show with care and the usual extras. I haven't watched the making-of documentary -- which is substantial in length -- because I want to watch the series in order first. And I really don't care about extras, what I want is the original series, which they've done here, offering up the full-length original broadcast episodes. Nonetheless, Drescher's audio commentary was disappointingly dull. Fran, darling, next time call me and we'll drink Bloody Marys and I'll prompt you with questions and the commentary will be hilarious! Your fans deserve no less.

With so many shows getting repackaged and sold at a lower price, you might be wondering why so many other shows are NOT on DVD or BluRay in complete sets. Blame the music. So often, the music rights prove insurmountable, which I blame completely on the idiocy of music rights' companies and the unions. No one anticipated selling shows like this, so they should have made reasonable accommodations when the opportunity for a new revenue stream popped up. They didn't and so many TV shows are unavailable or only in bastardized form, like WKRP in Cincinnati for so many years (that's finally been fixed, mostly) and Northern Exposure (kind of, but not really). What makes The Fugitive unusual is that this iconic series has been tripped up not by preexisting songs used in the show's soundtrack but by the original score. For some legal reason, whole chunks of the show have to be overlaid with a new synthesized score rather than the original one, rightly infuriating fans. That problem has not been fixed here, even though it was finally dealt with on an earlier boxed set. Go figure!

So buyer beware. This is no way to binge watch the adventures of the fugitive as he tracks down the one-armed man.

Rawhide is even worse, in ways. This show has become iconic because it turned Clint Eastwood into a star. Or at least a name who then went to Italy, made some silly films and unexpectedly became a superstar. He was the co-star in this Western which ran for eight seasons and was the fifth longest running Western in US TV history. That means it has more than 200 episodes of this hour long drama. And THAT means that the cost of doing a top-notch job of remastering has proven overwhelming, with Season Four for some reason bearing the brunt of the issue. It's noticeably inferior to the others. If you can ignore that, this is a solid western, combining season-long arcs with stand-alone episodes in a way one doesn't expect from a show of this era. And it's easy to see why Eastwood became a star and he was featured more and more prominently as the series progressed.

Cheers is one of the great sitcoms of all time, though it would have been even greater if they'd called it a day when Shelley Long called it a day after five seasons. It was made for personal reasons but no sitcom got better after five seasons and only The Mary Tyler Moore Show maintained its excellence for seven. Cheers might have gone seven and indeed Kirstie Alley was a fun new foil for Ted Danson. Nonetheless, it invariably became repetitive -- a real problem for sitcoms since they typically offer variations on a theme unlike dramas which more often progress and change. And it benefited from Long's departure and the addition of Woody Harrelson as a dim-witted bartender. Bringing in new characters successfully is one of the hardest things a sitcom can do and when they do it well, a show really has greatness in its grasp. But eleven seasons? That's a lot of foreplay. Happily, the quality is off the charts good for five or so years and acceptable after that. You get it all here and while maybe you can binge watch it online, isn't a classic show like this worth displaying on your shelf?

Roger Moore was the perfect Saint, an even better fit for this droll character than James Bond. True, his performance as Simon Templar is often seen as an audition for playing Ian Fleming's iconic role, but I'd say Moore was at his peak here, especially in the black and white episodes early on, when the show was still drawing on the droll novels by Leslie Charteris. In later years, as The Saint became more Bond-like, the series lost its distinctive edge. Mind you, the Broccolis would have been fools NOT to cast Moore as Bond. But if you've never seen Moore in this show, you've never seen Moore at his best.

Has a TV show ever been more easily encapsulated than MacGyver? Mention the name to anyone and they immediately offer up some variation on, "All I need is bubble gum and a paper clip and I can crack that safe!" Our can-do hero with a practical knowledge of science that would make Bill Nye proud, MacGyver was likable for relying on his smarts rather than his brawn. That puts him in a long line of TV heroes like Jim Rockford and the Mission: Impossible team (who were always out-smarting their foes rather than out-punching them). It's not all gussied up (like most of the shows here, this is a no-frills repackaging of a previously available set) but you get the series and the TV movies and a whole lot of ideas for your high school science fair project.

Chuck Norris looks to be in great shape. His iconic TV show Walker Texas Ranger? Not so much. To be fair, it wasn't much to begin with, featuring Norris in low-key hero mode until he was forced to martial arts his way out of a jam, something that happened dependably early and late in each episode. Annoyingly, this set does not contain the more recent TV movie (which ended with a cliffhanger) or the spin-off series that lasted only six episodes. Surely no one else in the world would care but fans willing to buy the entire Walker Texas Ranger oeuvre? Can't Conan O'Brien do something about this?

And then there is The Colbys. I don't mind that The Colbys is available on DVD as a complete set, even though it only lasted two seasons and was pilloried by critics I think EVERYTHING should be available in complete boxed sets at a low price. And for sheer ludicrous, 1980s cheese courtesy Aaron Spelling, it doesn't get any sillier than this spin-off/Xerox of Dynasty. And yet, the price is off-setting. (You can find it discounted but this is still crazy expensive.) And the fact that this is the final credit for the legendary Barbara Stanwyck is depressing and hilarious and funny all at the same time. (I can laugh only because Stanwyck was a pistol right up to the

end, quitting after one season and telling anyone and everyone it was the worst piece of junk she ever made.) And the hair! The hair on the cover displayed by the female cast is almost frightening in its immensity. This is EXACTLY what Empire will look like in 20 years.

But good, bad or indifferent as I may be for each individual show, I am delighted these are collected in boxed sets for their fans. But there are so many shows I'm dying to see, dying to put on my shelf and say, "See? This is what I love!" Shows like:

I'LL FLY AWAY

ST. ELSEWHERE

TATTINGERS

THE MUPPET SHOW (the entire run in one boxed set, compactly and cheaply priced)

DOCTOR WHO (complete sets for each Doctor, please)

thirtysomething

THE DAYS AND NIGHTS OF MOLLY DODD

THE TRACEY ULLMAN SHOW (fat chance since variety shows are a bear to get clearances on)

THE DAVID LETTERMAN SHOW (his morning show, the entire run, seriously)

HOLOCAUST (the complete original broadcast miniseries, not the trimmed cut out now on DVD)

AMERIKA (the 1987 miniseries)

AMERICAN DREAMS (complete series, all the original songs needless to say)

AN AMERICAN FAMILY (the entire documentary series, not highlights for pete's sake)

THE PAPER CHASE

And I'm sure I'm missing a ton of your favorites. Where or where are they?

**LEVIATHAN** (\$34.98 BluRay; Sony)

**STILL ALICE** (\$34.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Classics)

**CYMBELINE** (\$19.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

**AMERICAN SNIPER** (\$44.95 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

**THE COBBLER** (\$34.97 BluRay; Image Entertainment)

**THE ADMIRAL: ROARING CURRENTS** (\$29.98 BluRay; CJ Entertainment)

**MR TURNER** (\$34.99 BluRay; Sony)

Leviathan was one of the most critically acclaimed films of 2014, thanks to world class director Andrey Zvyagintsev, who has made a string of good to great films like *The Return*, *Elena*, and *The Banishment*. This movie is a deeply caustic look at Putin's Russia, made with the director's usual hypnotic control of every element of cinema; you're reminded of Cronenberg and Egoyan at their best. Somehow, it was Russia's pick for the Oscars and even got nominated though how that happened remains a mystery. You'd think it would be the last film Russia would submit but they did. My guess was the chance to win Russia's first Oscar was worth swallowing its pride over submitting a film that thumbed its nose at the regime in power. It didn't work but hopefully people will give the film a shot.

Julianne Moore did win the Oscar for *Still Alice* and her technically accomplished, career peak performance as a linguistics professor fighting early onset Alzheimer's. It's a performance that is far superior to the film itself and yet of course it wouldn't exist if the film wasn't there to provide the showcase. Moore's work is worthy of a better, stronger-minded movie but still one worth watching.

Ethan Hawke continues his eccentric, deeply satisfying career, veering from *Boyhood* to smarter than your average bear horror films to keep his box office mojo to *Cymbeline*, his second adaptation of Shakespeare with director Michael Almereyda. While not the triumph that was their *Hamlet*, it's fun and offbeat and worth a look for fans familiar with the idea of setting Shakespeare's plays in different contexts. Toss in some theater and his

solid journalism and Hawke continues to grow and challenge himself and craft a satisfying body of work.

American Sniper is disturbing, disturbing for how it smooths out and ignores the jagged darkness at the heart of Chris Kyle's life as depicted by Kyle himself in his sometimes unintentionally revealing book to the bizarre lies he made late in life (like claiming to have picked off looters from the roof of the Superdome during the aftermath of Katrina or punching out Jesse Ventura at a funeral for dissing America and the Seals) to the tragic way he died. A great and challenging film could have been made from his life but director Clint Eastwood was not interested in that. The fact that it's been so successful and that people embrace his book rather than being challenged in their assumptions about him by it is I suppose not surprising. But it is sad. Kyle himself laid out the fact that he was no Sergeant York, however brilliant at his job of sniper, but people don't want complexity, they want to cheer.

Adam Sandler has always mixed in ambitious projects amidst his comedies, sometimes to great effect, such as the offbeat gem *Punch Drunk Love*, sometimes to not so great effect like *Spanglish*. *The Cobbler* is a misfire, though clearly one made with the best of intentions to mine an old-fashioned, old Hollywood, off beat sensibility. It begins whimsically, with Sandler as a cobbler who uses the mysterious old machine in the basement of his shop to mend the shoes of a gangster...only to discover that doing so allows Sandler to take the place of the person whose shoes he is fixing. He gets to be a gangster and his father among others and of course learns to be a better man. Mixed in is a murder AND a subplot about gentrification and an evil landlord and it firmly and completely loses its way though Sandler is not at fault. Director Tom McCarthy is an odd one. I liked *The Station Agent* (though found it over-praised) but I really didn't like *The Visitor*, which I found offensive in that way that only truly liberal, heart on their sleeve well-intentioned films can be. But then I liked *Win Win* (a sweet little movie with Paul Giamatti at his best and with high school wrestling as its backdrop). And now *The Cobbler* is a mess. Maybe I should only watch every other movie he makes? Which means I'm really looking forward to *Spotlight* with Mark Ruffalo, about the uncovering of the Boston child molestation coverup by the Catholic Church.

South Korea has been on fire at the box office, turning out terrific films that dominate the Asian market and should cross over in the US more and more. *The Admiral: Roaring Currents* is a prime example. Not since Russell Crowe's *Master and Commander: The Far Side Of The World* has a major film reveled in period naval heroics so completely. This film set in the 16th century tells of an epic sea battle between a tiny 12 ship navy of South Korea facing and somehow defeating a 300 ship invading force from Japan. Every Korean knows the story but you don't need any history to appreciate the scope and excitement of the battle scenes here. If Errol Flynn popped up, the sense of seeing an old Hollywood gem would be complete. Good fun.

Finally, there's Mike Leigh's ode to the painter Mr. Turner. Unlike his exuberant, life-affirming masterpiece *Topsy-Turvy*, this is a darker, more eccentric beast. Turner grunts and growls throughout the film, glowering as he stamps into a home and glowering as he stamps out. We suss out his life -- a tiresome wife and children, idiotic hangers-on in the art world, a few rare folk he admires and respects, the maid that provides some sexual relief and imagines herself more important to him than she is - but only in bits and pieces. Still, it's a fascinating and compelling movie thanks to Timothy Spall's central performance. He commands attention, even as he wishes everyone would just go away and let him get back to painting. Another gem in Leigh's impressive career and a rare film about painters that doesn't immediately seem over-heated or just absurd.

**MAKE WAY FOR TOMORROW** (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

**GOODFELLAS** (\$34.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

**MIAMI BLUES** (\$24.97 BluRay; Shout Factory)

Three films that don't really belong together except that they're all very good.

*Make Way For Tomorrow* (1937) isn't just good, it's a classic, albeit one over-looked for many years. Director Leo McCarey won an Oscar for directing *The Awful Truth* the same year it came out, he thanked the Academy

but said they gave it to him for the wrong movie. He was right. Essentially, *Make Way For Tomorrow* shows two old people who simply can't afford to live on their own anymore. (This was in the era before Social Security came into its own, when the poverty and even homeless rate for elderly people -- who had worked hard all their lives -- was shockingly high.) Our couple is lucky: they have kids willing to take them in. But none of them are willing to take both in, so they must split up and go to separate homes. It's cruel and amusing and awful to see them both feel so in the way and deeply touching to see how in love they still are. The couple are given one day together and it feels like the last time they'll ever see each other, so it becomes a special one to them. They go out to dinner and walk the streets and unlike their children the entire city seems to respect and appreciate their deep love and goes out of its way to make everything perfect for them. The entire time they spend together is like a dream this one final day and the heartbreaking finality of their goodbye when it's over makes the preceding charm all the more bittersweet. It's a simple, beautifully acted tear-jerker, though even that seems small compliment for such a remarkable achievement. Criterion presents it with care, including discerning commentary from Peter Bogdanovich and others. Any serious film buff needs to see it pronto.

Everyone knows *GoodFellas* is a masterpiece, right? Director Martin Scorsese made *Raging Bull* in 1980 and *GoodFellas* in 1990. I was really really excited to see what he had up his sleeve for 2000 but unfortunately he didn't direct a film that year and in 2010 it was just *Shutter Island*. Oh well. *Raging Bull* lost Best Picture to *Ordinary People* and *GoodFellas* lost to *Dances With Wolves*. Both winners are actually good films and hardly Oscar travesties, but yeah, I wish *GoodFellas* had won. It's such a FUN movie (unlike *Raging Bull* which is great but a hard movie to love). Scorsese pulls out all the stops, using freeze frames and slow motion and dramatic pop songs but always in service of the story. I don't understand how anyone could think this or *The Godfather* glorifies organized crime. These guys seem like lunatics and the last think I'd do after seeing it is wonder where I could go to take my pledge of omerta. But it does make me want to go make movies.

And I doubt you've heard of *Miami Blues*, even though it stars Alec Baldwin as a just-out-of-prison nut ready to go on a crime spree. It's a B movie in the best sense of the word, an offbeat flick with Jennifer Jason Leigh wonderfully odd as his gal and Fred Ward as the weary cop who has to bring them down. It's the crowning achievement of journeyman director George Armitage and based on the terrific novel by Charles Willeford. If you like Elmore Leonard at his best, check out Willeford. It's the sort of movie you caught on cable back and thought, "Hey, that was really good!"

**LOONEY TUNES MUSICAL MASTERPIECES** (\$19.97 DVD; Warner Bros.)

**THE BEST OF THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW** (\$59.95 DVD; StarVista/Time Life Entertainment)

The Looney Tunes cartoon shorts have been packaged and repackaged eight ways to Sunday. If you're really a fan, you should jump on one of their more definitive boxed sets, which are very well done. Here you'll find a random collection of shorts tossed together for their strong link to music. Grouping shorts by director or character makes sense, but "theme" collections like romance or war or mom or music are pretty random. HOWEVER. However, music is hugely important to some of the all-time great Looney Tune shorts. They were the first exposure a lot of kids got to classical music and opera. (Make that practically the ONLY exposure a lot of kids got to opera.) So while the theme may be random and the repackaging of shorts available elsewhere pretty pointless to hardcore buffs, if you don't own any Looney Tunes collections, this is a pretty good place to start. "Rabbit Of Seville," "One Froggy Evening" and of course that masterpiece of masterpieces "What's Opera, Doc?" guarantee this is worth repeating numerous times. And the bench is pretty strong, too, thanks to some other lesser known gems. Nonetheless, what they've always avoided is that one killer collection of the absolute greatest hits that simply everyone should own. The best of the best is always spread out over two or three sets with very good (but not absolute classics) mixed in. What are they waiting for?

The Best Of The Ed Sullivan Show is a disappointment and you can blame our old friend music clearance. Getting the rights to show complete performances becomes both a logistical nightmare and wildly expensive, so

no one even tries. The actual classic performances you could put in a boxed set taken from Ed Sullivan's variety shows would be remarkable. Instead, what we get here are TV specials, filled with bits and pieces of various great performances (by and large). As if that weren't bad enough, entire discs devoted to balancing acts and animal acts are surely of interest only to those who find America's Funniest Home Videos the height of entertainment. So what you get are glimpses of the performances you'd LIKE to see in full if only they were available. But they're not.

**AMERICAN EXPERIENCE: LAST DAYS IN VIETNAM** (\$29.99 BluRay; PBS)

**MAGICIAN: THE ASTONISHING LIFE AND WORK OF ORSON WELLES** (\$34.98 BluRay; Cohen Media Group)

Here's another mixed bag. Last Days In Vietnam is one of those documentaries that is a credit to the great work of PBS and shows like American Experience that are the lifeblood of documentary filmmakers looking to do serious work. The theatrical version that was nominated for an Oscar is here. But you also get the extended and preferable version shown on TV. It's justly acclaimed as one of the best films of 2014.

Magician on the other hand is a pleasant if perfunctory look at the career of Orson Welles. He did have an extraordinary career and director Chuck Workman (a famed editor) is of course a fan, as is any sane lover of cinema. Welles was a prodigy in everything he did, from Shakespeare to radio to cinema. But he's also been covered and written about and immortalized in countless ways and nothing Workman offers up is remotely new or insightful. I suppose if you were utterly ignorant of his life this might be fine, but for anyone better informed, there's nothing to see here that hasn't been seen before. Workman does include footage from various projects that were stillborn or little seen but again, even casual fans have seen most of it before.

**CALL THE MIDWIFE SEASON FOUR** (\$44.98 BluRay; BBC Home Entertainment)

**ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK SEASON TWO** (\$39.97 BluRay; Lionsgate)

**BROADCHURCH: SEASON TWO** (\$39.98 DVD; Entertainment One)

I must admit I stopped watching Call The Midwife. I really didn't care for the star Jessica Raine, though I was a sucker for most everything else about this soapy series. Then my favorite character -- Chummy, of course -- disappeared and I was sunk. Happily Raine has gone on to greener pastures and SPOILER ALERT at the end of this season Chummy has returned. So all in all a promising season four with season five hopefully even better. Besides, I really can't resist the plummy narration of Vanessa Redgrave (even though it's a little trippy to have the series narrated by a character who's not on it anymore). Mind you, it's not a great show, but it is diverting fun. Who doesn't enjoy a good delivery of a bouncing baby every episode or so? My mother wouldn't miss it for the world.

Season Two of Orange Is The New Black lost its way or proved ambitious, depending on your point of view. It seemed to forget about the central character as it explored the prison world and the large cast they'd assembled. Some felt this was bold. I'd say it was foolish but we'll wait and see whether this new approach bears fruit in Season Three. This is another show I felt people went bonkers for all out of proportion to its creative success. But it is a terrific cast so at least there's that.

The British edition of Broadchurch was a highly acclaimed miniseries. What it wasn't was a premise for an on-going TV drama. But the enormous critical and commercial success of this crime drama starring David Tennant meant they couldn't leave well enough alone. So here we have the very unnecessary season two of Broadchurch and it's exactly what you'd expect: just like Broadchurch Season One but less so.

**MOMMY** (\$19.98 DVD; Lionsgate)

His career has only just begun but writer, director and actor Xavier Dolan has proven he's the real deal in countless ways. If you care about cinema at all, you need to see his movies. If you haven't heard of him yet, you

will. Think Fassbinder in his wide-ranging interests and eclectic dramas. Think Godard in his playful approach to filmmaking. Think Dolan since someday his name will typify an electric style of directing that seemed to have disappeared along with the new wave. Dolan burst into prominence with his masterful *I Killed My Mother*. He followed it up with the drunk on Wong Kar-Wai menage a trois film *Heartbeats*. That was trumped by his drama *Laurence Anyways*, which is messy and Fellini-esque at points and sprawling and epic and sweet and funny. I haven't even seen *Tom At The Farm* because it didn't get a proper release. (Despite massive acclaim and a rising international reputation, Dolan must fight and scrape to get his work made.) He's filming *It's Only The End Of The World* with a starry cast that includes Marion Cotillard and Lea Seydoux. And just out on DVD is his engrossing film *Mommy*. It's a family portrait of codependency, an out of control son and his almost out of control mother and their dance of death, taunting and teasing and dominating each other with their endless need for love and attention. It's shot almost obsessively in a very restricted format, not that you need to care about that. But it's deeply intense as they argue and bicker and laugh and make up and fight again, one scene of tenderness exploding into another of rage and confusion. It stars Antoine-Olivier Pilon in a remarkable performance as Steve, the explosively unhappy kid of his widowed mom Diane (played with brilliance by Dolan's muse Anne Dorval). Steve is out of control. He's funny and sharp and sarcastic and scene after scene shows him maintaining his cool, maintaining his cool and then losing it in ways you can see coming a mile away but have no idea how to derail. It's frightening. You want to blame his mother but she needs as much help as he does. They try desperately to maintain some semblance of sanity, with a neighbor ready to tutor Steve and help him get back on track at high school. It might just work though Steve is such a live wire you fear such a thing isn't really possible. But maybe it is and it's working, sort of, and sure he loses his temper but he's a good kid, you can see that. And then it doesn't work. And then it does again. And back and forth until you're exhausted emotionally and have no idea which one of them needs help more. The film has two visual flourishes that may be lost watching it at home unless you have a really big TV. But it may in fact play better at home with the intense focus on these two people as riveting as it gets. Dolan angers and upsets you here, raising your hopes even when you know you shouldn't hope to much. Dorval is of course great and Pilon is either a genuine find or is simply captured at just the right moment by Dolan to give this performance in this film, the sort of child actor performance French directors often handled so brilliantly. (Dolan is Canadian, by the way.) *Mommy* is as absorbing and tough minded and good as any film you're likely to see in 2015 and sure to be on my best of the year list. Don't miss it.

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