

# DVDs: The Wonder Years, Tom Cruise on Repeat and More

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Still catching up with tons of releases from the past few weeks, new movies, classic films and a TV show that has been a long, long, long time coming. Cue the music...

**THE WONDER YEARS -- COMPLETE SERIES** (\$249.99 DVD; StarVista/TimeLife) -- Okay, here's the deal. You can get the six-episode first season set most everywhere. Costco apparently has a bundle of season one and two. And [direct from TimeLife/StarVista](#), you can buy the entire series in collectable forms, all of them quite elaborate that start in price at \$250 set that comes in a school locker complete with binders and yearbook on up. That's about \$2 an episode since they produced 115 in all. What kept The Wonder Years out of sight for so long? Our old buddy music rights; various contracts and clauses make it prohibitively expensive to release shows that feature pop music. Some shows ditch a bunch of cues (like Northern Exposure), others substitute brand new songs in a similar vein (a trend pioneered by teen-friendly dramas on The CW and the like). And some shows just languish until someone does the work and strong-arms people and makes deals until finally most of the original songs can be included. That's the case here with the people behind this set going so far to keep the essential tunes (the pilot episode alone is crammed with classic rock) that when they couldn't use "Riders On The Storm" by The Doors without breaking the bank, they turned to a tribute album to The Doors for a track that included original members of the band playing with Perry Farrell just to maintain the right vibe. That's admirable and apparently most of the original cues are present.

I wish the same care and dedication had been spent on the remastering. The episodes I've screened look perfectly fine but they are nowhere near the level of quality one expects these days from remastered classic TV. Shows thirty years older than this look terrific whereas the visuals on this set are merely adequate. Funnily enough, since the credits include home movies and it's all a nostalgic look back, one can deal with it better than, say, one would on Twin Peaks. ([Which I just reviewed last week and looks great](#). And since they're reviving the series, what better time to watch the original?)

My strong preference is for boxed sets that are not bulky and awkwardly shaped, but that's me. If you want a keepsake, a memento, I must admit the school locker (complete with magnets you can use to personalize it) made me smile. Inside are binders with all the discs covering all six seasons along with copious extras, especially an extended sit-down with the actors from the family in a kitchen and the actors from school in a hallway setting (next to more lockers). Their pride in the series is palpable as well it should be. Quite a few shows have won TV's top award in their first season. But no show did it with fewer episodes before or since -- The Wonder Years only had a six episode first season, but the pilot and third episode "My Father's Office" were stone cold classics. On top of that, the show is the best series to ever launch after the Super Bowl (the only other serious contender is Homicide: Life On The Streets). So no wonder those six episodes made such a big impression. (The runner-up, by the way is All In The Family, which won the Emmy for Best Comedy after just a 13 episode first season.)

One always thinks of this show as sentimental... and it is, in a good way. But while the series looks back fondly, it doesn't look back with rose-colored glasses. Time and again, the series reveals the pain and complications of growing up in 1968 and beyond, rather than say the safety and security of pretending everything will be solved

by the end of each episode. And it never mines the era for cheap laughs. When Kevin decides he's going to change his image by dressing up "cool," the laughs might have started and ended with silly costumes, the sort of thing *The Brady Bunch* would do. But Kevin's discomfort and the laughs of his obnoxious older brother arise from the fact that Kevin is trying to be someone he's not. If you need any further proof of the show's seriousness of intent, just fast-forward to the finale where the easy pretense that Kevin and Winnie were destined for each other is set aside in favor of real life.

I haven't had a chance to take in the entire series yet and see how it holds up. But the early episodes remain exceptional. The acting -- especially by Fred Savage -- is top notch, the dialogue funny and true (whenever Kevin sees Winnie he says "hi" and then she says "hi" and then he says "hi" again because he's always unsure of what to say), and the storylines both universal and specific enough to ring true. They picked up where *Leave It To Beaver* left off in terms of how kids and their parents interacted. (Sometimes, neither side wanted to know what the other side was truly thinking and doing, like the hilarious outcome of Kevin getting a copy of a book on sex.) It's a great companion piece to *American Dreams* and *I'll Fly Away* and *Freaks & Geeks*, all shows that mined the past to tremendous effect. It's not perfect, but it's great to finally have *The Wonder Years* on tap whenever we need a blast of bittersweet memory.

**EDGE OF TOMORROW** (\$35.99 BluRay combo; Warner Bros.)

**THE ROVER** (\$24.99 BluRay; Lionsgate) -- Last summer has been widely painted as a disaster. But in fact, of the 13 big budget movies Hollywood released, at least ten of them proved profitable. You can't get a much better track record than that when making movies. Ironically, one of the films that was in the "loss" column (that is, not a big hit) is actually one of the best. Tom Cruise and Emily Blunt star in this sci-fi thriller, a war movie crossed with *Groundhog Day* and video games, where a soldier keeps reliving the last day of his life until he gets it right. It's the best reviewed movie of the summer, one of the best of the year according to most everyone and deserves to be one of those films that is truly "discovered" and championed by fans who now have no excuses.

*The Rover* has a tougher row to hoe. It's not pure adrenaline like *Edge Of Tomorrow* (or *The Road Warrior*). It's a more existential tale of a post-apocalyptic world with Guy Pearce wandering the outback, a hostage (Robert Pattinson) in tow as he seeks...something. Written and directed by David Michod (*Animal Kingdom*), it's brutal and quiet and distinctive. And Pattinson may have actually turned a corner and put *Twilight* behind him once and for all.

**SHERLOCK HOLMES -- THE COMPLETE GRANADA TELEVISION SERIES** (\$229.98 BluRay; MPI) -- Sherlock Holmes in New York. Sherlock Holmes as an action hero. Sherlock Holmes in space. (Oh, it'll happen.) Heck, they've even rediscovered a silent film portrayal of Holmes thought lost forever. With the immensely popular spins on Holmes ranging from Benedict Cumberbatch to Robert Downey Jr. to Jonny Lee Miller (my favorite of the new guys), with David Suchet winding up his portrayal of Poirot and on and on, it's great to revisit Jeremy Brett. The entire run of Brett as Holmes in a classic portrayal of the classic sleuth is available on this BluRay set, which looks terrific. You get two Watsons, an increasingly eccentric (and in real life, ailing) Brett, and top-notch production values. No gimmicks. No modernist spins. Just the tales of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle presented faithfully with intelligence, a great deal of wit and verve. The set includes the usual sort of extras (commentaries from director John Madden and screenwriter Jeremy Paul, a chat with actor Edward Hardwicke, vintage interviews and so on). But what really matters are the shows themselves, a landmark work of television that will endure long after the never-ending spins on the famous consulting detective have exhausted themselves out.

**WE ARE THE BEST!** (\$29.98 BluRay; Magnolia)

**THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL COLLECTORS EDITION** (\$99.99 DVD; StarVista/TimeLife)

**MOTOWN 25: YESTERDAY TODAY FOREVER** (\$39.99 DVD; StarVista/TimeLife) -- Director Lukas

Moodysson again proves himself one of the best directors working today with the unexpected treat *We Are The Best!* It tells the charming story of three young girls growing up in Stockholm in the 1980s who decide to form a punk band. Charm to spare, with Moodysson garnering wonderful performances from his three leads, misfits all who find a place in music, sort of.

Another blast from the past is this boxed set gathering some of the best performances from the vaults of the late night concert series *The Midnight Special*. An unexpected ratings hit, the show lasted many years. Here on this collection of 16 hours of music on eleven DVDs [available direct from StarVista/TimeLife](#), you can find live performances (never lip synced) of some of the biggest acts of the day, ranging from LaBelle in full space gear regalia to the winning simplicity of Jim Croce to Tom Petty and Marvin Gaye and seemingly everyone else you can think of. You also get a disc of stand-up acts like Steve Martin and George Carlin, another disc of behind the scenes and more. Above all, it's the performances, presented with no fuss. Performing on TV can be difficult, but here they designed studios to accommodate the acts with state of the art sound and that care shows up here. An even more deluxe set at \$199.90 on 20 DVDs is bursting with Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame performances over the years in addition to all the earlier sets. It's both a time capsule and timeless, thanks to the great talent on display.

Less impressive musically is *Motown 25: Yesterday Today Forever*. This smash hit TV special [also available direct from StarVista/TimeLife](#) is now most interesting for capturing the era. Musically, the house band is big and anonymous and numerous acts sound a little disjointed. There are highlights to be sure, from Marvin Gaye's rambling, almost off the cuff discourse on musical history to the playful showdown between The Temptations and the Four Tops. Of course what everyone remembers is Michael Jackson, but today that's less impressive since he's so clearly lip-syncing. Nonetheless his dancing is spectacular. The clips of the show (telling the story of Motown and with it our country and especially race) are strong. But you'll remember the telling details more than the music: Diana Ross reuniting for all of ten seconds with the Supremes before immediately stepping in front of them yet again or the way simply hearing Michael Jackson speak a few lines sent the audience into a frenzy. For fans, the set does contain performances that never aired and behind the scenes footage, most of it modest but somewhat interesting.

**SLEEPING BEAUTY DIAMOND EDITION** (\$36.99 BluRay combo; Disney)

**BEDKNOBS & BROOMSTICKS SPECIAL EDITION** (\$29.99 BluRay combo; Disney)

**TARZAN SPECIAL EDITION** (\$29.99 BluRay combo; Disney) --

Historically, Disney has always rotated their classic films. Every seven years they used to theatrically release one of their gems, like *Pinocchio* and *Dumbo*. They have done the same on DVD and BluRay, making a title available for a limited time, then keeping it off the market for a while and then releasing it again in some slightly new configuration. This has led to a dizzying array of editions of the same movie. It's not all their fault (the few remaining stores that carry BluRays don't stock deep catalogs; you need to put out a "new" release to get them to stock it). I'll tackle these three Disney movies as movies and then hint at where they fall in the spectrum of all those varied releases.

To me, 1959's *Sleeping Beauty* has always been lesser Disney, despite the presence of Maleficent as a memorable villain. The stained glass beauty of the animation is obvious, but it still seems less vivid and alive than Disney at its peak with *Bambi* and *Pinocchio*. (The backgrounds are essentially static; wisely, they turned this into an artistic choice rather than trying to paper over this economic necessity.) And of course it doesn't get more passive than a dozing member of royalty. But it has its modest charms. This edition is identical to one from a number of years ago, but it looks positively smashing (that last edition was a full restoration). If you don't own it and want it, this is state of the art. If you do own the most recent edition, you'll find no improvement in picture and sound and fewer extras.

*Bedknobs & Broomsticks* is a turgid, would-be followup to *Mary Poppins* that proves how miraculous that

accomplishment was. It's everything Mary Travers probably feared would happen to her book and didn't. But like seemingly any film in the Disney canon, it has its ardent admirers. And they're upset this edition reverts back to the extended theatrical cut and relegates the scenes that were previously restored to the film just to bonus features. The story, such as it is, involves Angela Lansbury as an apprentice witch and three children who discover her secret just in time for them to band together and foil the plans of a Nazi invasion. The set piece "Portobello Road" is seemingly endless so it's a little shocking to discover they actually cut a good six minutes or so out of it. The mind boggles. Mostly, it plays like an extended series of set pieces that have little to do with one another (like a tiresome bit of live action mildly crossed with animation involving a soccer match). Wit and humor and interest are rare. But it looks terrific. If you're a fanatic, you'll want to hold on to the road show DVD that showed the movie in all its exhausting glory. If you're a casual fan, this edition looks terrific. If you've never seen it, don't bother.

Tarzan is another story entirely. It's one of Disney's best animated films, a rare foray into adventure and just out and out fun. I'll remain forever puzzled that they didn't deliver a theatrical sequel to this hit -- if any Disney film could justify a sequel, surely it's Tarzan with his endless series of adventures! I actually can't suss out how this edition compares to earlier editions. I'm pretty sure it's not a dramatic upgrade. If you own it, no need to jump. If you don't and aren't familiar with it, you're in for a treat.

**IN THE FLESH SEASON TWO** (\$29.98 DVD; BBC)

**REPUBLIC OF DOYLE SEASON TWO** (\$39.99 DVD; Acorn)

**GEORGE GENTLY COLLECTION SERIES 1-4** (\$99.99 DVD; Acorn) -- Let's face it: one person can't watch all of these movies and tv shows. There are more than 300 scripted series on TV and cable and online at the moment. THREE HUNDRED! So sometimes in desperation I farm out this horror series to one friend for their expert opinion or that crime show to another who loves them a good murder. It's the only way to give more shows a shot and help you find out what's worth your time. I kept In The Flesh for myself and Season One proved a keeper. It's an odd duck: a zombie show that uses the idea of a zombie to tell a very intriguing story. What would it be like to be cured, to die and become a zombie and chow down on your friends and neighbors and then "come back" from that? If you could remember what you did, how would you feel? How would your community feel about welcoming you back? That's the story of In The Flesh, which centers on a young man who committed suicide, only to find out he's come back to life and more miserable than ever since you know, he was a zombie. It works on many levels. The original brief miniseries wasn't particularly intended to become a long-running show. But winning the BAFTA for Best Miniseries changed everyone's mind. That's left season two wide open in terms of where it goes in telling the story of these Partially Deceased Syndrome sufferers. Luke Newberry is very memorable as Kieren and I'm intrigued to see what happens.

In fear of missing out, I always keep an eye cocked for buzz words. Describe a show as like The Rockford Files and you've guaranteed I'll take the time to watch at least an episode or two. That did the trick for Republic Of Doyle, a Canadian series about a private eye and his ex-cop dad who have opened their own detective agency. Shambling is definitely the order of the day, though they are going upscale by actually getting a proper office. I've got a lot of catching up to do: the show begins its sixth and final season in a few days. It's been a triumph for the star, creator, showrunner, producer and headwriter Allan Hawco who seems to be ending things on his own terms.

See, when you don't watch everything, you sometimes miss a real gem. That's the case with Inspector George Gently, the ongoing British drama that is my new favorite murder mystery. Martin Shaw is the crusty Gently, a by the books man of integrity in 1960s England where it sometimes seems half the cops are bent. Lee Ingleby is the sidekick, a young man eager for promotion who has a lot to learn but at least knows it. They have a wonderful, sparring relationship and the show gets better and better with every season. I'm in the midst of season three and a seventh season will air in 2015. each TV movie length episode is based on one book in the long-running series by Alan Hunter, so they've got about 30 books to go. Shaw and Ingleby are terrific, the

production values and writing improve day by day and the casting (mostly by David Shaw and Toby Whale) is tremendous. Even the smallest parts are performed by terrific actors. Dive in now on DVD or [via Acorn TV](#). This one's a keeper.

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**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.