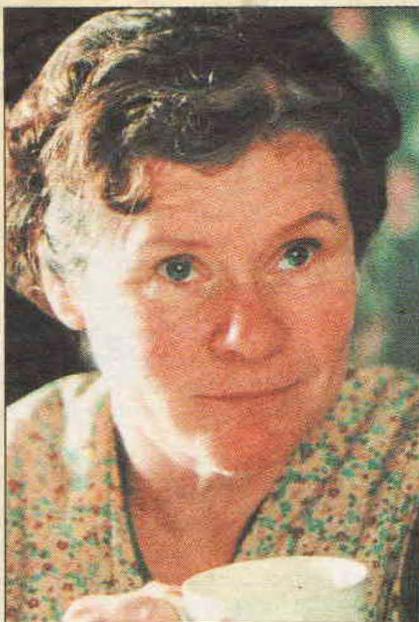


This week's DVDs

By MICHAEL GILTZ



Vera Drake

★★★★

New Line, \$27.95

While it's no secret where the sympathies of the great director Mike Leigh lie on the abortion issue, it's a credit to the artists involved that "Vera Drake" is far from a polemic about abortion. Imelda Staunton's incredible performance as Vera — a sweet little old lady in '50s England who helps women terminate pregnancies — is too good to limit this to an "issues" movie. No extras; this spare, memorable film speaks for itself.

The Twilight Zone: Season 2

★★★★

Image, \$99.99

TV's greatest anthology series has been released on video and DVD in numerous different combinations, but none can match the care of this lavish set (and the recently released Season 1 at \$119.99). You get audio commentaries, interviews, "Twilight Zone" radio plays, promos, Rod Serling's appearances on talk shows and more. And, of course, classic episodes such as "Eye of the Beholder" and "Nick of Time," in gorgeous transfers. Essential.

Kagemusha

★★★★

Criterion, \$39.95

As George Lucas winds up his "Star Wars" saga (and endures brickbats for the films' fading appeal), he can take great comfort in one act of kindness: he and Francis Ford Coppola reignited the career of director Akira Kurosawa by backing this brilliant 1980 epic. Extras include — of all things — Suntory whiskey commercials shot on the film's set.

British War Collection

★★★★½

Anchor Bay, \$89.98

These discs may constitute the find of the year — five little-known but generally terrific British war films, in a

fine new boxed set. No extras, but fine transfers of 1955's "Colditz Story" (a nifty prison-break movie), 1953's tense U-boat drama "The Cruel Sea" and three more. Film buffs should jump.



Apollo 13: 10th Anniversary Edition

★★★★½

Universal, \$22.98

Ron Howard's best movie is still this matter-of-fact but gripping look at the space program in its most gripping and courageous hour. The 1995 movie about a mission gone awry is still a textbook example of no-fuss filmmaking. New extras for this edition include two new documentaries — "Lucky 13: The Astronauts' Story" and "Conquering Space: The Moon and Beyond" — totaling about an hour in length.