

# DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

## The Sopranos: The Complete Third Season (\$99.98; HBO)

Maybe "The Sopranos" simply set the bar too high, but the second season was clearly a step down. The female characters, in particular, seemed secondary. That problem continues with the third season, but a second viewing shows a lot of very good storylines: the rape of Lorraine Bracco and her moral dilemma about whether to get revenge through Tony; "Pine Barrens," the great episode directed by Steve Buscemi (included here with a commentary); the Russian maid always looking for her artificial leg; Anna-bella Sciorra as Tony's unstable mistress; and Jackie Aprile Jr., who was doomed to die because actor Jason Cerbone was so much better looking than anyone else on the show. Not the best show on TV right now, but very solid indeed and better than I remembered.



TONY SOPRANO

## Schoolhouse Rock! (\$29.99; Disney)

Disney's Michael Eisner is under fire right now over falling stock prices. Maybe he can take solace in the accomplishments of the past. Certainly few items on his resume are as memorable as Eisner greenlighting "Schoolhouse Rock!," a boldly unconventional series of short films that peppered the ABC schedule for years. "Conjunction Junction," "I'm Just a Bill" and the other 44 classics are all here, along with lots of extras. Kids love to play DVDs over and over again; this is one you won't get tired of soon. If they don't know the clips, get them to play one or two as a prelude to a feature film. And when they're asleep? You can play "Interjections!" and shout out the chorus all you want.

## The Rookie (\$29.99; Disney)/When Baseball Rocks (\$19.95; Q Video)

This mild, true-life story about a high school teacher taking one more shot at a major league baseball career — and actually getting to the show — is a testament to the hunger for family films. It's rated G, so there isn't a curse word to be found and who would notice or care? Five or ten years ago, studios would have insisted the director insert an expletive or two just to make sure the movie got a PG, so 14 year olds wouldn't think it was just for "kids." *The Rookie's* \$75 million gross proved family films don't need to be gross to work. Besides, why do they think even so-so animated flicks like *Ice Age* and *Lilo & Stitch* do so well? People want family films that adults can enjoy even if kids aren't around. Of course, if what you really wanted was baseball (especially with the looming strike), you might also want *When Baseball Rocks*, which shows superstars Mike Piazza cooking, Derek Jeter shooting a commercial and so on, along with videos by bands like Uncle Kracker and Jimmy Eat World. It's strictly for hardcore fans. What, no Bernie Williams playing classical guitar? That would have really rocked.

## Pretty in Pink/Some Kind of Wonderful (\$24.99; Paramount)

These movies were both directed by Howard Deutch, but they still have the stamp of writer-producer John Hughes. Other filmmakers took the lives of teenagers seriously (French directors like Truffaut, obviously, and Americans like Nicholas Ray with *Rebel Without a Cause*). But what made John Hughes perhaps unique was that he took teens seriously and his movies spoke straight to them — not to their parents or society at large to try and "explain" them. If adults came and enjoyed the wrong-side-of-the-tracks romance in *Pretty in Pink* or the misfit in love with the prom queen in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, that was all well and good. But these movies were for teens and teens alone. (And what great taste Hughes had in young actors.)

## The Life of Birds (\$59.98; BBC)/The Blue Planet Boxed Set (\$74.98; BBC)

The British are clearly superior at several things: making tea, playing cricket, and producing nature documentaries. Two exceptional examples are out this week, both narrated by the legendary David Attenborough. *The Life of Birds* aired on PBS in '99 as a ten part series. It, along with the blockbuster success of the book *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, proved what a major hobby bird watching is for Americans. *The Blue Planet* is even better — an extraordinary, strikingly beautiful look at the ocean. If you somehow missed its original airing last year, rent this. But you'll be buying a copy soon enough. By all rights, it should turn on a new generation to scuba diving.