

DVDs this week



Forrest Gump (\$24.95; Paramount)

This is an easy movie to hate — at the center is a hero who succeeds not because of any inner sweetness but through dumb luck and the misfortune of others. Tom Hanks manages to invest Forrest with more complexity than this Zelig-like character deserves



Hanks as Gump

and he's the main reason Robert Zemeckis' stunt-of-a-film was so commercially successful. It was a real gamble and to those involved probably nothing more than an oddball, technically challenging story, duly celebrated with a special edition DVD loaded with extras. But Forrest as a hero is disturbing for anyone of any political stripe who is passionate about the world. On Vietnam, for example, he isn't for or against it. He is incapable of being for or against it. And when he runs across the country and becomes a celebrated figure, it isn't because Forrest has any committed stance to promote — he just does it. The joke is on us for thinking his act should mean something. *Forrest Gump* celebrates this lack of involvement

as perhaps the ideal way to get by in the world. Don't get caught up in issues, says *Gump*, because we're all just like that hapless little feather blown about by the winds of change. We're kidding ourselves if we think we can affect our life or the world at large in any meaningful way. That's an invidious message; unintentional, perhaps, but invidious nonetheless.

South Pacific and Anne Frank (\$29.99 each; Buena Vista)

ABC is the only major network in the last few years to consistently score commercial and critical successes with their TV movies and miniseries. (Which makes its decision to eliminate the regular slot for original TV movies all the more puzzling.) Here are two prime examples from last season: Glenn Close is too mature to play Nellie Forbush as originally imagined. But she adds her own twists to *South Pacific* and surrounds herself with a fine supporting cast, including Harry Connick Jr. This is marvelously sung and far better than the stiff theatrical version of 1958. Like ABC's *Annie*, this is the best adaptation yet of a classic musical. Including a look at Anne's happy childhood and terrible end in a death camp gives her story new power. So does a top-notch cast featuring Ben Kingsley, Brenda Blethyn and Hannah Taylor Gordon.

Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory (\$24.98; Warner Bros.)

It's easy to see why Warner Bros. is eager to remake this movie. You could improve it immediately by dropping the dreadful song — "I've Got a Golden Ticket" — (sung poorly by the otherwise adorable Peter Ostrum) and special effects would pump up the magic, right? But good luck to the poor actor who tries to follow the inimitable Gene Wilder as Wonka. Next to *Young Frankenstein* (and with a nod to his hilarious work in *The Producers*), this is Wilder's most memorable role. He's weird, disturbing, charming and cruel — often in the same sentence. When Wonka explodes with fury towards the end, it's truly scary. And when he melts a moment later, it's all the more unexpected. Robin Williams — bruited about as a possibility — would probably look like he wanted to hug the kids the moment they arrived. Warner Bros. would be better off putting this on stage, where the imagination needed to recreate the Chocolate Factory might make it seem fresh again.

Sullivan's Travels (\$39.95; Criterion)

Everyone has a cult favorite they will defend to the death. But film buffs are usually less eager to share their disinterest in or even antipathy for what is widely regarded a masterpiece. Well, here's one of mine. I love Preston Sturges and think *Miracle at Morgan's Creek*, *The Palm Beach Story*, and *Hail the Conquering Hero* are witty, subversive, and brilliant classics. I'm slightly less enamored of *The Lady Eve*, which is quite funny yet demands too much of a suspension of disbelief. But why is *Sullivan's Travels* held in higher esteem than all of these gems? It's about a director who longs to make a "serious" film, only to ultimately realize that comedy serves a great purpose. But Sturges practically makes the self-important film his character is dissuaded from. Sure there are funny tweaks of Hollywood, but there is also a silent, ponderous seven minute tour of a shantytown to make our hero feel guilty for begrudging the poor bums a little laughter. Most critics will tell you I'm wrong and Criterion has presented it beautifully, with all the requisite extras including a terrific "American Masters" documentary on Sturges.

— Michael Giltz