

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Twin Peaks (Most of) The First Season (\$59.98; Artisan)

What an exciting, frustrating moment. After years of anticipation, "Twin Peaks" finally comes to DVD—but without the brilliant, two-hour pilot that set the whole series in motion. What we get are the final seven episodes from the first season. Just as mysteriously absent is David Lynch, who with Mark Frost brought this wonderfully subversive melodrama to primetime. (Even the title sequence is eerie and majestic!) The episodes hold up marvelously, but there are more problems: at \$60, this amounts to almost \$10 an episode, which is far too much, especially given the missing pilot (which isn't available on DVD). They should have fit it onto three discs instead of four and kept the price at \$40. The packaging is beautiful, but who wants to read chapters 3-9 when the beginning and end of the story are nowhere in sight?

Moulin Rouge (\$29.98; Fox)

Some people believe Julia Roberts won the Oscar thanks to the "Erin Brockovich" DVD. The extras on that release showcased a number of deleted scenes where Roberts was acting up a storm; they proved so popular (almost every reviewer mentioned them) that it might have been a key reason her turn in the film stayed fresh in voters' minds. Perhaps the same thing will happen to "Moulin Rouge," a DVD as delightfully overstuffed as the frantic, tiring film itself. Director Baz Luhrmann offers witty, winning commentary and the many extras include extended dance sequences and musical numbers that have been recut (note to Baz: when it comes to editing, sometimes less is more). Ewan McGregor and Nicole Kidman have charm to spare (he's never been more appealing onscreen) and when things slow down for a moment (such as during the first half of Elton John's "Your Song"), it's delightful. Somehow, "Moulin Rouge" on DVD seems less exhausting than it did in the theaters — maybe because you know you can always hit pause.



On the "Rouge" carpet: Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor.

The Princess Diaries (\$29.99; Disney)

This is silly fluff about a gawky teenage girl who finds out she is next in line to reign over a small kingdom. Her distant grandmother comes to town to give her pointers on how to be a princess. Lessons are taught and morals are absorbed about the importance of living up to responsibility, learning who your true friends are and so on. "Princess Diaries" is slightly duller to describe than watch (Anne Hathaway has charm as the teenager), but it's always disconcerting when a teenage girl is given a makeover and turned from a cute, eccentric kid with curly hair into a less attractive mannequin and we're supposed to think she looks better. So why review it? Because any excuse to see Julie Andrews on the big screen is a good excuse; she brings wit and charm to every scene. Surely the whole paint-by-numbers story is worthwhile if only to hear Andrews walk away from a traffic accident in San Francisco and get away with the dismissive farewell, "Goodbye, trolley people!" With her diction, it sounds like a compliment. And why doesn't Andrews have her own TV series?

Hot Summer (\$29.95; First Run)

This hilariously silly bit of kitsch has been out on DVD for a while and I almost let it slip by. It's called the East German "Grease," but since "Grease" opened on Broadway in '72 and this film came out in '68, perhaps "Grease" should be called the Western "Hot Summer." Anyway, the comparison is apt — though "Grease" seems aware of its camp appeal, while this musical is earnest fun. East German teenagers go to the Baltic Sea on vacation, fall in love, fight, dance, and jump around in choreographed synchronicity. "I want adventures, adventures and more adventures!" is a typical lyric. Highly enjoyable and a very calm, simple antidote to the over-the-top excess of "Moulin Rouge."

Uprising (\$24.98; Warner Bros.)

This NBC miniseries about Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto who fight back against the Nazis gets noticeably better as the situation becomes more and more despairing. Given the subject matter, it will surely get recognition come Emmy time, especially for the all-star cast that includes Leelee Sobieski, Donald Sutherland, Jon Voight, and Hank Azaria. But the actor that sticks with me is the little known Stephen Moyer, who cuts a heroic figure as the Jewish freedom fighter Kasik. Magnetic, sexy, vulnerable and funny, and all with the barest of dialogue.

— Michael Giltz