

# DVDs this week

## By Michael Giltz

### Gosford Park (\$26.98; Universal)

Robert Altman's deliciously entertaining "we-don't-care-who-dunit" is so good, it proves he will never win anything but an honorary Oscar. If Altman couldn't snag a statue with this sexy, funny, Anglophilic romp (and against less than formidable competition), then what could he win with? It improves vastly with repeated viewing, so don't bother renting it. For all the humor, it's the emotional wallop in the final scene between Helen Mirren and the legendary Eileen Atkins that sticks with you. Secret weapon: Kelly MacDonalld in the central role of the maid, holding her own with Maggie Smith and the rest of the superlative cast. A classic.

### A Beautiful Mind (\$29.98; Universal)

For all the cavils people might have about this as a movie or as history, one thing is clear: Russell Crowe's withdrawn and interior performance is brilliant. Crowe, in one of his best roles yet, suggests flashes of wit, anger, fear and self-knowing mockery all through his eyes. He's a consummate professional (and his taste in poetry is pretty good, too). Crowe is only let down at the very end by poor aging makeup and a Nobel acceptance speech that is far more maudlin than John Nash would have ever countenanced. Crowe's next role — the heroic lead in Patrick O'Brian's classic seafaring novel *Master and Commander* — is ideal. His partner? Former imaginary roommate Paul Bettany. Like all great actors, Crowe has mastered the equally difficult task of picking great projects.



Russell Crowe

### Buffy the Vampire Slayer — The Complete Second Season (\$59.98; Fox)

Does Fox do the best jobs of repackaging TV shows because it's smart or does it look smart because it has the best shows to repackage? It follows "The X-Files" and "The Simpsons" — which set the standard for TV shows on DVD — with the second season of "Buffy." For two years, beginning with these shows, there was simply no better series on television. Buffy's passionate romance with Angel came to the fore, Willow fell for a werewolf, Xander and Cordelia turned from bickering as enemies to bickering as a couple and Spike (the marvelous James Marsters) came to town. Future generations will curse us for not showering "Buffy" with the Emmys it deserved as surely as Angel was cursed for discovering true happiness with his mortal honey.

### My Favorite Year/Oh, God/Big Wednesday (\$19.98 each; Warner Bros.)

Even when it was brand-new in 1982, the delightful romantic comedy *My Favorite Year* seemed like an oldie-but-goodie. Surely this clever film by Richard Benjamin was a long-lost gem from the golden days of Hollywood? That was fitting, since this nostalgia-drenched movie starring Mark Linn-Baker celebrated the golden days of live television. Bursting with memorable moments (dinner in Queens, the comedy writer who won't speak out loud, stealing a policeman's horse) and all of them upstaged by Peter O'Toole as the matinee idol Alan Swann. Also just out is John Denver's surprisingly effective turn in *Oh, God*, Carl Reiner's sweet-natured comedy that gave George Burns the role of a lifetime. John Milius' *Big Wednesday* — which follows surfing buddies for about a decade — now looks like Shakespeare compared to the Frankie and Annette beach comedies that preceded it and the upcoming surfing drama *Blue Crush*, whose trailer seems populated by a cast addicted to Botox injections.

### History Lessons/Queer as F\*\*k (\$29.98; First Run Features)

A Sapphic *Atomic Café*, *History Lessons* combs through newsreels, educational films, stag clips and other marginalia to chart the depictions of lesbians on film. The most fun comes when director Barbara Hammer winkingly skews the material to show lesbians stomping through history at every turn. *Queer* collects six short films notable for their silly, irreverent tone.

### The Importance of Being Earnest (\$29.98; Criterion)

Criterion can be cruel — releasing Anthony Asquith's classic 1952 version of Oscar Wilde's perfect comedy can only humiliate the current hapless release, which has a fine cast led by Rupert Everett and Colin Firth but a sadly misguided take on events.