

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

The Manhattan Project (\$14.95; MGM)

Tonight, John Lithgow should win the Tony Award for his turn as a cynical gossip columnist (is that redundant?) in the musical "Sweet Smell of Success." If you haven't seen the original drama with Tony Curtis and Burt Lancaster, by all means rent it. If you have, celebrate Lithgow's win by seeking out this clever little drama he starred in. It's about a high school student who builds a nuclear weapon for his science fair project and creates hysteria among government agents. The film was directed by long-time Woody Allen collaborator Marshall Brickman.



LITHGOW

The Mothman Prophecies (\$27.96; Columbia TriStar)

This spooky drama about a Washington Post reporter who stumbles upon all sorts of weird occurrences in a small town is a bunch of hokey. But stars Richard Gere and Laura Linney make it earnest fun and director Mark Pellington recovers here from the silliness of *Arlington Road* to create a palatable sense of unease. A terrific score by Tomandandy helps tremendously.

Victor/Victoria (\$19.98; Warner Bros.)

A smashing musical comedy from the brilliant director Blake Edwards and his wife, the peerless Julie Andrews. The story of a woman pretending to be a man pretending to be a woman in (very) gay Paris is tremendous fun and raises several questions. Why don't they make more musicals? Why didn't the winning James Garner have a better movie career? Why would anyone rent this movie when they know they're going to want to watch it again and again? Andrews tried to distance herself from the good cheer of her image with the caustic, breast-beating and breast-baring of *S.O.B.* Happily, her turn in the recent *The Princess Diaries* showed Andrews accepting her place in cinema with grace.

L.I.E. (\$29.95; New Yorker)

The story of a child molester winning the confidence of a vulnerable boy is plenty of plot for one movie. This well-acted drama makes the mistake of also throwing in male prostitution, suicide, and an FBI sting operation. Brian Cox is memorable as the molester Big John, but anyone describing his relationship with the boy as unexpected or daringly complex is very confused. Big John is a classic predator: complimenting the boy, sharing his interests, and plying the kid with kindness until he gets his hooks in. Creepy.

Blue Velvet Special Edition (\$24.98; MGM)

At the just-concluded Cannes Film Festival, jury head David Lynch presided over a bland, middle-of-the-road awards ceremony, giving the top prize to Roman Polanski's dull World War II drama *The Pianist* and dutifully spreading the other goodies among the least objectionable films. (He gave nothing to the shockingly bold *Irreversible*, which has moments so unpleasant it raises the question of what a "good" movie must accomplish.) Lynch's dark heart is better served by going back to his timeless classic *Blue Velvet* in this brand new special edition. Here, at least, Lynch showed no fear.

The Hustler/The Verdict (\$19.98 each; Fox)



NEWMAN

Maybe Paul Newman loved playing losers so much because he was (and is) so darned good looking. In *The Hustler* he plays a small-time pool player challenging Minnesota Fats. In *The Verdict*, he plays a washed-up, alcoholic lawyer with one more chance at redemption. But do we love those losers because they're played by someone with a twinkle in his eye, however dimmed? Classics both.

McCabe & Mrs. Miller (\$19.98; Warner Bros.)

A bleak, muddled, comic Western about a new businessman in town and a hooker with a heart of gold. Rarely has something so pedestrian sounding been so fresh, so bold and so hard to hear. Robert Altman's greatest film, so what more do you need to know? Features songs by Leonard Cohen which are completely out of place, completely inappropriate and which work beautifully.