

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

The X-Files - The Complete Fourth Season and American Roots Music

(\$149.98; Fox) and (\$42.95; Palm Pictures) Fans of TV are in a golden age, where virtually every show of note is becoming available on DVD. (Look for "Twin Peaks" in December.) You can expect TV programming to follow two paths. Long-running shows like "The Sopranos," "The Simpsons" and "The X-Files" are coming out in deluxe box sets long after the shows have squeezed out all profits from multiple airings on their networks and in syndication. (This boxed set from the fourth season finds "The X-Files" at its absolute peak.) TV movies, miniseries and documentaries are available almost the day they air. Miniseries and movies are available practically before the show has finished airing. The terrific PBS documentary "American Roots Music" is a prime example. It's in the middle of a four week run showcasing the history of blues, country, jazz, gospel, folk and so on through a wealth of performance clips, commentary from the likes of Bonnie Raitt and narration by Kris Kristofferson. It's not even finished yet and the DVD - along with a faultless 4 CD boxed set and a tie-in hardcover book - is already in stores.



DUCHOVNY

The Cheap Detective

(\$19.95 each; Columbia TriStar) You might have to act quickly to catch Neil Simon's new play "45 Seconds from Broadway." But if you want a quick fix of his borscht belt humor, you could do worse than this Peter Falk starrer that spoofs Humphrey Bogart. Woody Allen got there first with the funnier "Play It Again, Sam." But this cast - Ann-Margret, Sid Caesar, Eileen Brennan, Abe Vigoda and Nicol Williamson (!) - keeps it watchable.

Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory 30th Anniversary Edition - Widescreen

(\$24.98; Warner Bros.) Power to the (little) people! After Warner Bros. put out a 30th Anniversary DVD of Willy Wonka a few weeks ago, they were deluged with letters and email from angry fans who demanded that the cropped version (edited for VHS tape and cutting off about a third of the image) be joined by a widescreen one. Warner wisely caved and now you won't miss a single Oompa-Loompa. The studio should be applauded for acting so quickly, but chided for being so lazy in the first place. Now if only fans of small British movies were furious letter writers, we might actually get the widescreen version of "Chariots of Fire."

Little Women

(\$24.99; Image) The great Kate - Katharine Hepburn, of course - gave one of her loosest, most entertaining early performances in this classic take on the Louisa May Alcott novel. The 1994 version



TRACY & HEPBURN

starring Winona Ryder and directed by Gillian Armstrong was also terrific. But there's no need to choose - watch both. And there's no need to wait ghoulishly for some excuse to celebrate Hepburn's work. Celebrate her life - now, while you can still toast her talent in high spirits - by diving into one of the dozen or so DVDs available. Anything with Spencer Tracy is worthwhile, of course, with their first pairing "Woman of the Year" and their peak "Adam's Rib" (\$19.98 each; Warner Bros.) the first among equals. She held her own with the fiercest

leading men: chewing up more scenery than Peter O'Toole in "The Lion in Winter" (\$19.98; MGM), chewing out John Wayne in "Rooster Cogburn" (\$24.98; Universal), and facing down old age marvelously with Henry Fonda in "On Golden Pond" (\$19.98; Artisan). "Summertime" (\$29.95; Criterion) has added poignancy because her dive into the canals of Venice led to one of her lifelong illnesses. And no movie anywhere can better the romantic comedy sheen of "The Philadelphia Story" (\$19.98; Warner Bros.). Boy, she was yare!

Also out: "Lara Croft - Tomb Raider" (\$29.99; Paramount), Angelina Jolie is quite spirited and perfect for the role, but this is purely mechanical, even by the standards of the "video games turned into movies" genre; "America's Sweethearts" (\$27.96; Columbia TriStar), in which Julia Roberts proves she can draw a crowd even when going through the motions; and "Places in the Heart" (\$19.95; Columbia TriStar), in which Sally Field struggles as a Depression-era woman trying to raise a family. It ends on a remarkable note of great comfort for anyone who is grieving.