



Nothing — no movie, book, CD or TV show — has given me as much pleasure this year as watching the entire five seasons of **"Upstairs Downstairs"** (\$299.95, A&E) over several months. Subtle, intelligent and tremendously entertaining, the story of the Bellamy family and their servants was TV's first great drama and still ranks as one of its best. Mind you, it's bulkily packaged and too expensive — but well worth all the trouble. "Upstairs" is just one of a flood of TV shows getting deluxe treatment on DVD.

You could also dive into **"The Mary Tyler Moore Show," "Schoolhouse Rocks," "All in the Family," "I Spy," "Buffy the Vampire Slayer,"** a crushing amount of **"Star Trek: The Next Generation," "M*A*S*H,"**

"The Larry Sanders Show," "Blue Planet: Seas of Life" and on and on. Best of all, some of the most recent titles — **"24," "Once & Again"** and **"Sports Night"** —

came out at very affordable prices. The biggest disappointments? Finally getting the first season of **"Twin Peaks"** only to discover it didn't include the two-hour pilot.

A circular graphic with the text 'BEST OF 2002' in a bold, sans-serif font.

"Lord of the Rings: Special Edition"

This longer version of **"The Fellowship of the Ring"** (\$39.99, New Line) is superior in every way to the theatrical cut. For fanatics, the extra two discs of extras should tide them over until **"The Two Towers"** comes out on DVD in the summer. So why isn't this the top DVD of the year? Because it only contains the director's cut — not the shorter, theatrical version. Fans shouldn't have to choose.

Other great lavish special editions included **"Beauty and the Beast"** (\$29.99, Disney) and **"Memento"** (\$27.95, Columbia TriStar).

"In the Mood for Love"

I'm not obsessed with extras — give me a great print and 90 percent of the time I won't squawk. But Criterion always takes care to provide what it can and this exemplary edition (\$39.95) illuminates Wong Kar-wai's enigmatic, beautiful love story in useful ways. And the movie itself is one of the most gorgeous and hypnotic films in years. You could also include just about any other Criterion release on my list, such as **"Wild Strawberries"** or **"The Royal Tenenbaums,"** which just gets funnier and funnier every time you watch it.

"The Last Waltz"

One of the thrills for a movie fan is seeing a classic movie for the first time — and having it exceed your expectations. That's certainly the case with Martin Scorsese's elegiac **"The Last Waltz,"** a tribute to the Band and a riveting concert film (\$24.98, MGM).

Other musical treats include Criterion's lavish **"Monterey Pop"** (\$79.95, Criterion) and **"Koyaanisqatsi,"** one of the great head trips of all time (\$19.98, MGM) and a wildly influential film both visually and thanks to Philip Glass' brilliant, propulsive score.

"Donnie Darko"

The best part about DVD is the chance to give a movie that slipped away a second chance. I had no better discovery this year than **"Donnie Darko,"** a wonderfully twisted flick (\$14.95, Fox) starring Jake Gyllenhaal that deserves the much-abused tag of cult favorite. It just opened in the U.K. to great reviews and no wonder: This tale of a suicidal/homicidal teen driven toward violence by a very large, menacing rabbit who warns about the coming apocalypse is bold, unique, technically astonishing and quite mad.

"The Shop Around the Corner"

When all is said and done, what makes a great DVD is a great movie. This year, the studios really opened up the floodgates by releasing a ton of classics. The peerless romantic comedy **"The Shop Around the Corner"** — starring Jimmy Stewart — is just one personal favorite I'll do my best to wear out.

Other greats I can finally gorge on include **"The Thin Man"** (not recommended for those on the wagon) and Blake Edwards' **"Victor/Victoria."** (All \$14.98 from Warner Bros.) Who said Julie Andrews wouldn't sing again? With classics like this around, she'll be singing forever.