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DVDs: *Ripper Street*, *Borgen*, *Foyle's War* and More Great TV

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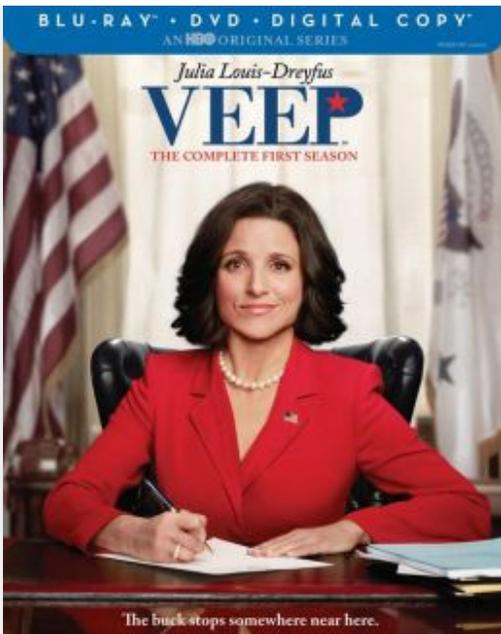
Great TV keeps flooding the DVD shelves because great TV is all over the airwaves. Here's a rundown of some recent releases. Now if only someone could deliver some great sitcoms... (*Archer* excepted, of course.)



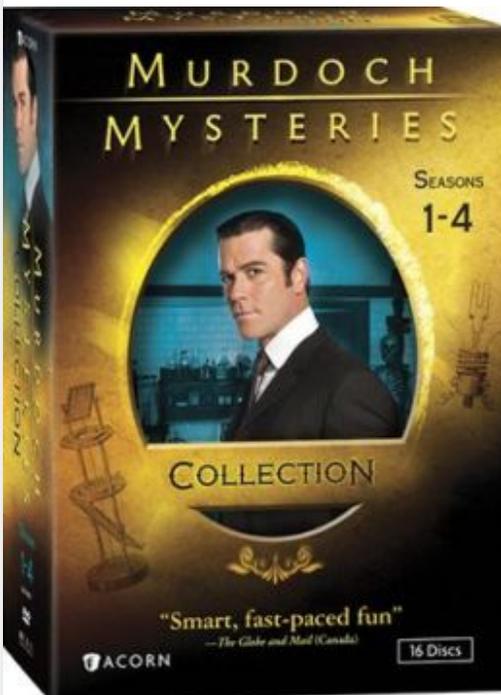
RIPPER STREET (\$29.99 DVD; BBC) -- One of the more entertaining and frustrating shows of the past year. Ripper Street has a strong cast and is just good enough to make you expect it to be a lot better. Our hero is Inspector Reid (Matthew Macfadyen), a man who must deal with crime in the East End after Jack The Ripper has taunted police and shamed them to the public. Jerome Flynn does yeoman's work as his no-nonsense sidekick but Adam Rothenberg steals the show as the impossibly knowledgeable Captain Homer Jackson. So what's the problem? The cases become a little silly, Reid is constantly steamrolling over everyone by thinking that yelling is a response to questions and Jackson really is absurdly multi-talented in a way that would shame Da Vinci. Logic also went out the window at the finale. But I did keep watching.

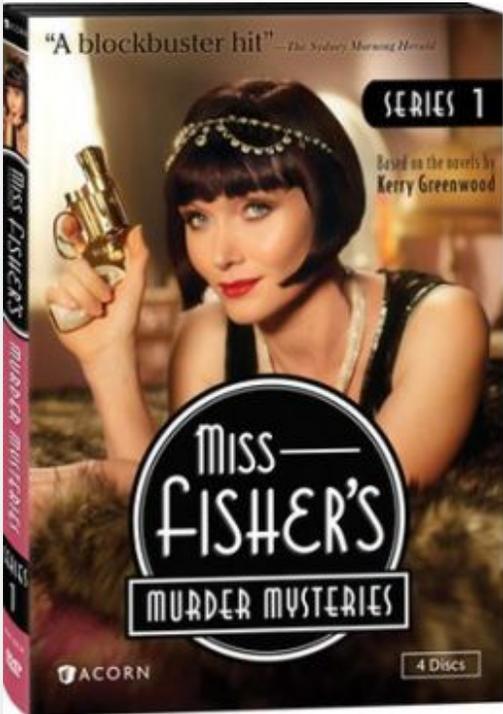
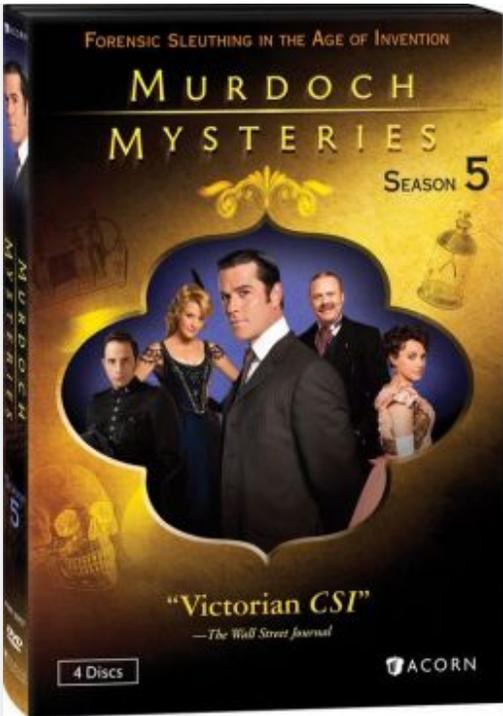


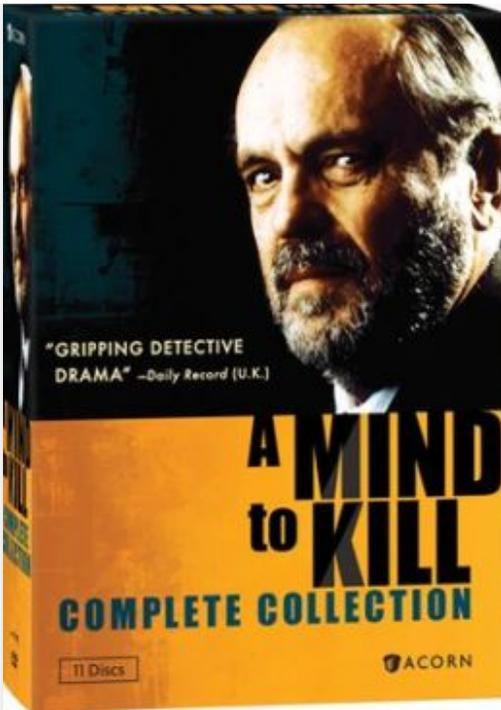
BORGEN SEASON ONE (\$49.99 DVD; MHz Networks) -- A superior drama, sort of a *West Wing* set in Denmark. Borgen follows the fortunes of Birgitte Nyborg, the first female head of her country. Played by Sidse Babett Knudsen with immense intelligence and appeal, Birgitte is a compelling character who proves steely without sacrificing her values (too much). She's got an idealized husband at home but you don't begrudge it since work can be so hard. Political machinations are more fun than criminal intrigue, but the subplot of a rising TV journalist has a lot of play and is the main reason the show doesn't reach absolute greatness. Johan Philip Asbaek is excellent as a spin doctor among a generally excellent cast. I'm sure we'll be seeing many of them for years to come. The show has already aired three seasons and called it a day, so here's hoping we won't have to wait long for season two.



VEEP COMPLETE FIRST SEASON (\$49.99 BluRay; HBO) -- Well, there aren't a lot of truly great comedies out right now, but there are some fun ones. Watching Julia Louis-Dreyfus balance self-effacement, raging political ambition, cynicism and caustic humor is a genuine pleasure. Compare this to the godawful 1600 Penn and you'll never take it for granted. It's not *Yes, Minister*, but it is fun.





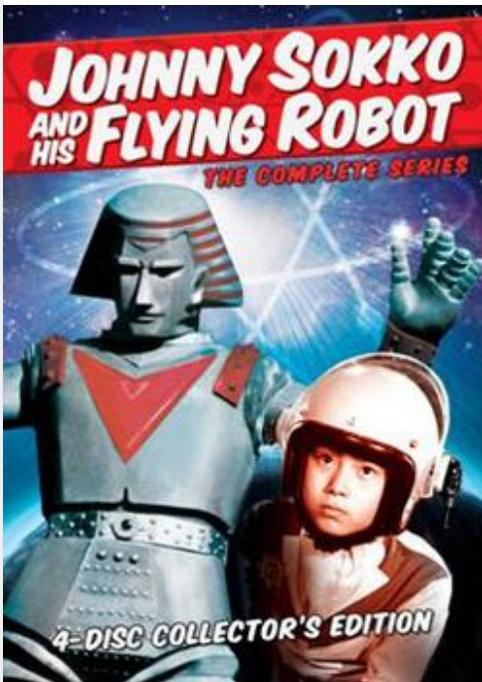
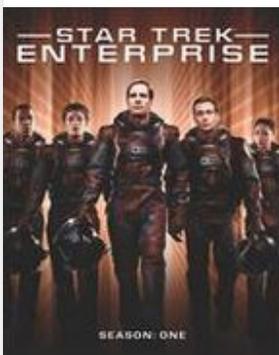


MURDOCH MYSTERIES SEASONS 1-4 (\$149.99 DVD: Acorn)

MURDOCH MYSTERIES SEASON 5 (\$59.99 DVD: Acorn)

MISS FISHER'S MURDER MYSTERIES SERIES 1 (\$59.99 DVD; Acorn)

A MIND TO KILL COMPLETE COLLECTION (\$79.99 DVD; Acorn) -- Eventually, every country -- indeed every city and town and neighborhood and time in history -- will have its own distinctive TV series. Canada has Murdoch Mysteries, a genial crime of the week show that is dubbed correctly as a *Victorian CSI*, though that doesn't quite capture the show's period charm, which is far lighter than the grim CBS procedural. It wavered a bit at first with forced references to the latest inventions (a telephone! electricity!) but soon found its footing. For those who lean more towards British cozys. In Melbourne Australia, Essie Davis has fun as the liberated Phyrne Fisher (you can see why they dropped her first name from the title). She's a 1920s flapper in Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries who thinks it's awfully fun to solve a crime and right wrongs and so on, as long as you can look marvelous doing it. Light fare, served up pleasantly and decent enough to make me want to check out the books by Kerry Greenwood that it's based on. Finally, Wales has the sober, dark series starring Detective Noel Bain (Philip Madoc). It's a tough, brutal world Bain operates but he maintains his humanity. The tourism board probably isn't thrilled with it, but mystery fans will be.



DOCTOR WHO: THE ARK IN SPACE (\$34.99 DVD; BBC)

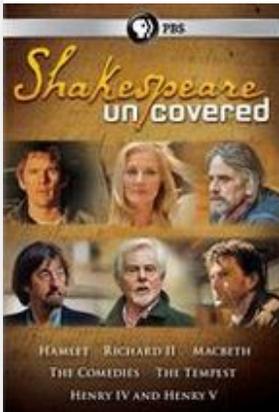
STAR TREK: ENTERPRISE SEASON ONE (\$119.99 BluRay; Paramount)

JOHNNY SOKKO AND HIS FLYING ROBOT (\$39.99 DVD: Shout) -- Sci-fi TV shows have such ardent fans, it's hard to let a franchise die. *Doctor Who* has the perfect excuse of a Doctor who jumps into new bodies (and thus new actors) when the old one is worn out. That's why it has been around for decades with no signs of flagging. Still, Tom Baker is one of the great Doctors and this multi-arc adventure from 1975 shows why. As usual, the BBC has loaded up the release with tons of supplementary info. But as usual I long for a complete boxed set devoted to Baker and each of the other Doctors, rather than this endless parceling out. Expensive, but they do add a lot of value. *Star Trek's* many reboots have arguably topped the original (*TNG*, obviously). This prequel is a bit of a disappointment because it was such a fresh idea to follow the team on their maiden voyages when technology was riskier -- it's like the difference between crossing the ocean with Columbus and crossing the ocean on the QE II. Sadly, this Scott Bakula-headed show never made the most of this idea. Finally, *Johnny Sokko* only lasted for one season in Japan but it was edited into dubbed episodes for the US and repackaged and aired in reruns so often it seemed like it was a bigger hit. Those who can't let go to their childhoods will welcome this antiquated blast from the past. Just don't show it to your kids; chances are they're too sophisticated to enjoy its creaky charms.

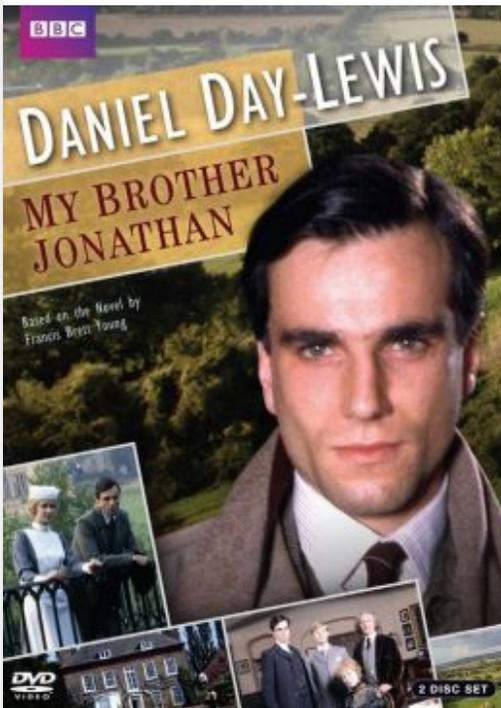
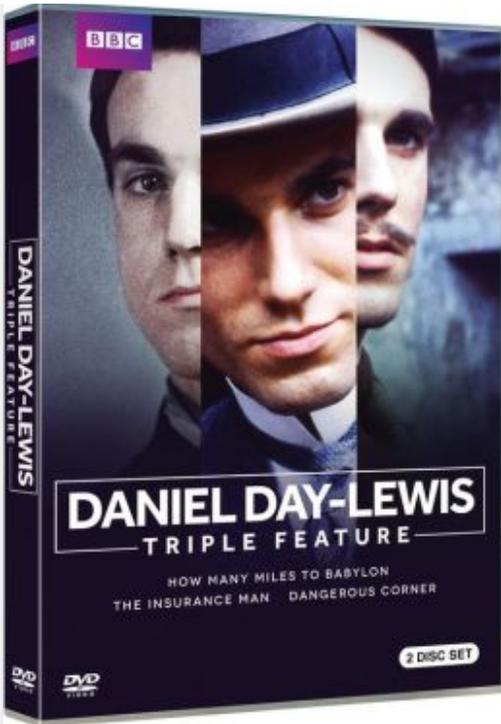


THE CAROL BURNETT SHOW: THIS TIME TOGETHER (\$59.99 DVD; StarVista) -- It took a long time but they're doing everything right with The Carol Burnett Show this time around. They got all the music rights and released complete uncut episodes in a massive boxed set filled with extras. Now they're releases individual boxed sets pulled from that mammoth

release for those who'd like to dive in but aren't ready for the whole megillah. That's exactly what you should do with classic shows: release the entire series and then follow it with a greatest hits or individual seasons. Too often it's done the other way around with fans snapping up individual seasons and then being forced to buy a boxed set to get some new extras. This particular 6 DVD set contains 17 uncut episodes featuring guests like Lily Tomlin, Bernadette Peters and Sammy Davis Jr. They've got solid extras though it's the skits I gravitated too, such as the "No-Frills Airline" but I remembered vividly the moment it started playing, along with parodies and new editions of *As The Stomach Turns*, *The Family* and so on. Good stuff.



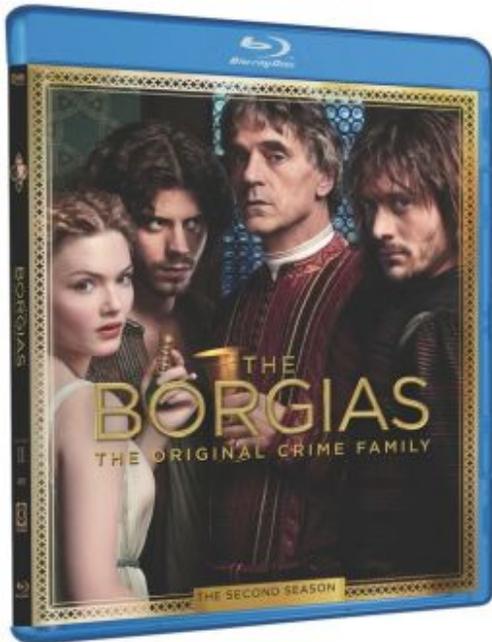
SHAKESPEARE UNCOVERED (\$34.99 DVD; PBS) -- Six talented artists get to weigh in on Shakespeare's plays, focusing on a particular work of genre and discussing what makes them great, the challenges and opportunities actors face and so on. You just know it's PBS. It's also quite entertaining, though everyone is sure to have their favorite artist they gravitate to. Obviously, to get audiences in their seats the show features stars like Ethan Hawke on *Macbeth*, Jeremy Irons on *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, Joely Richardson on *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* and so on. But it's director Trevor Nunn on *The Tempest* that makes you hope they go farther afield in future editions and draw upon other directors, writers, and behind the scenes talent to show how dramatically the right set and costumes and lighting can enliven a work.



DANIEL DAY-LEWIS TRIPLE FEATURE (\$24.99 DVD; BBC)

DANIEL DAY-LEWIS: MY BROTHER JONATHAN (\$24.99 DVD; BBC) -- What a treat.

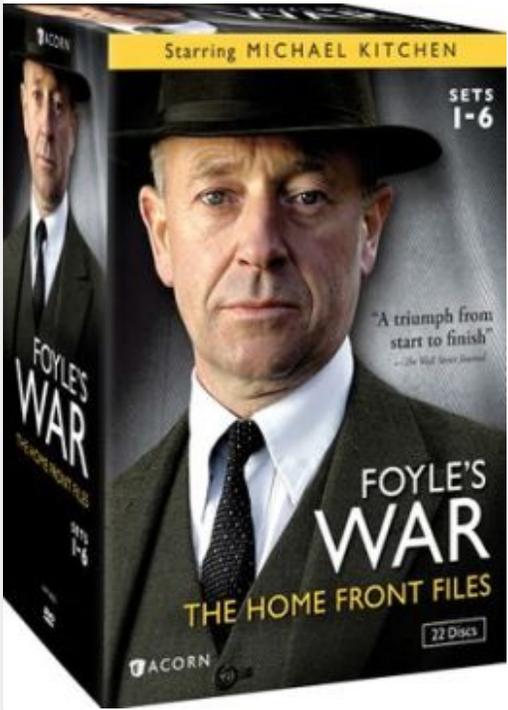
I think of Daniel Day-Lewis bursting onto the international scene when *A Room With A View* and *My Beautiful Laundrette* opened in New York City on the same day, announcing a rare talent. But these releases show he had already been honing his craft on British television. The triple feature is priced right and includes one movie written by Alan Bennett and directed by Richard Eyre and another written by J.B. Priestly. Clearly, Day-Lewis was spotted right from the start. *My Brother Jonathan* is a 5-part miniseries co-starring Benedict Taylor. Taylor plays the golden child of his family while Day-Lewis feels ignored. Look at that talented actor's work since then and you can see just how hard it is to catch a break and make a career. You'll appreciate anew how remarkable the career of Day-Lewis truly is.



THE BORGIAS SECOND SEASON (\$65.99 BluRay; Showtime) -- It's tagline is "the original crime family" but this soapy pleasure from Neil Jordan and overseen with grand malevolence by Jeremy Irons is far better than *The Sopranos* in Rome. Unlike *Dexter* and even *The Tudors*, it's been a little under the radar. Season two improved mightily on season one and with season three starting on April 14 and Irons destined for at least an Emmy nomination soon, now is a good time to catch up.



LOVE FOR LEON: A BENEFIT TO SAVE THE BARN (\$34.99 DVD; StarVista) -- I never made it to upstate New York to catch the concerts at the Barn, where Levon Helm would preside over a festive evening of fun. This tribute concert is a solid substitute, with John Mayer standing out on guitar on several tunes, Lucinda Williams on "Whispering Pine" and the general warm atmosphere appropriate to the title.



FOYLE'S WAR: THE HOME FRONT FILES SERIES 1-6 (\$149.99 DVD; Acorn) -- I saved my favorite for last. It may have stumbled a little after a brilliant start and foolishly decided to end things too soon. But this intelligent, entertaining show has an excellent cast, the creme of the crop of guest stars and above all an unwaveringly piercing, subtle and downright brilliant performance by Michael Kitchen as Foyle. Three new TV movies are being broadcast in the UK even as we speak. (They can't come to the US soon enough.) But those are set after the WW II when Cold War tensions and communist spies are on hand. What we have here are Foyle's wartime adventures, serving as a crime fighter at home when he'd rather be doing his bit overseas. Each episode illuminates some area of life in the UK during the war, such as rationing, the black market, Nazi sympathizers and so on. It's one of the real treats of the past decade and the crowning achievement of creator Anthony Horowitz. If you haven't seen it yet, jump.

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hlsy

15 Fans

I enjoyed Ripper Street much more than the author. Sure the forensics were more developed than was possible historically, but in CSI, lab techs can arrest suspects and get results in 10 mins. Loved the historical feel, the acting, the clothing(lots of plaid) and the soundtrack.

Very much a sleeper hit but better than most American TV.

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1

"...BORGES SEASON ONE A superior drama, sort of a West Wing set in Holland....".

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In reply to: [lenuk](#)



Michael Giltz ARTICLE AUTHOR

SUPER USER · 149 Fans · freelance writer

Thanks. The publicist had also caught my mistake and I corrected it right away. (At least I didn't say Greenland!) Geography was never my strong suit. But did you like the show?

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