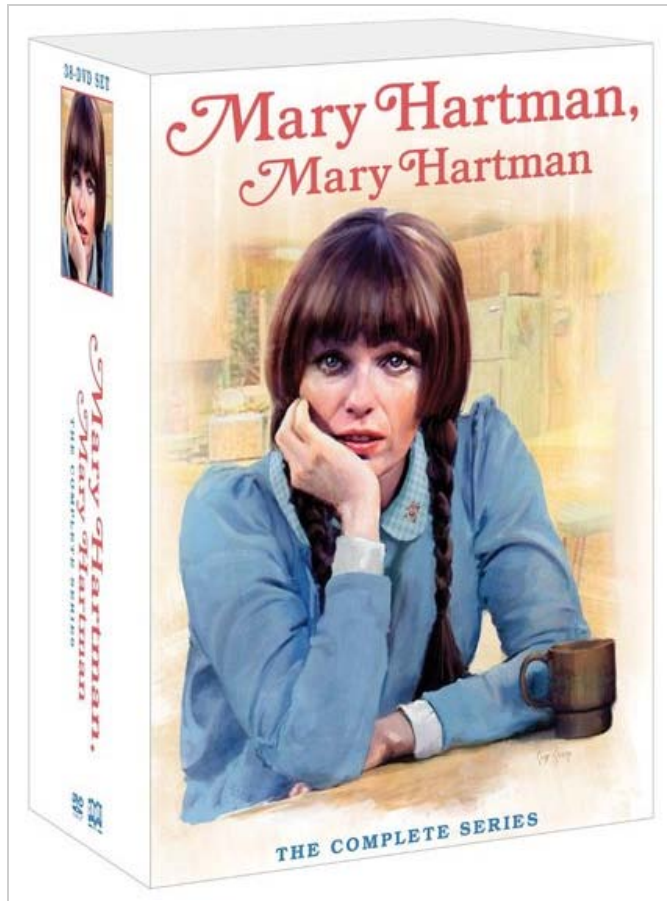


DVDs: The Long Strange Journey Of "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman"

Posted: 12/11/2013 1:43 am

Loads of DVDs and BluRays to tackle as the last wave of titles come out before the holidays. A few of the releases below hit stores on December 17 but most are out now. Need a last minute gift? Why wait? Coming next: a best of the year round-up. And if you want more choices, here's a recent [column covering some of the biggest boxed sets](#) out in recent weeks.

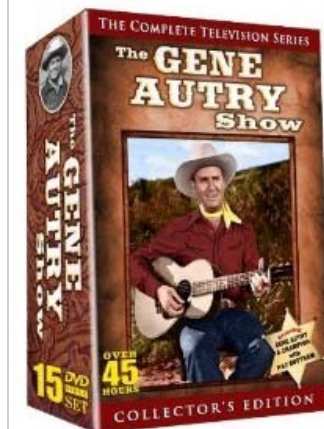


MARY HARTMAN, MARY HARTMAN COMPLETE SERIES (\$249.95 DVD; Shout Factory)

THE MOD SQUAD COMPLETE SERIES (\$219.95 DVD; VEI/CBS)

THE GENE AUTRY SHOW COMPLETE SERIES (\$79.99 DVD; Timeless) -- *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* is truly one of the strangest, most compelling and influential shows in TV history. There's never been anything like it, before or since. At heart, it's a soap opera, though most soap operas don't have a wicked sense of humor or an explicit mockery of a consumerist society. Somehow, when family tragedy strikes and Mary Hartman is more concerned about waxy buildup on her floors, it manages to make fun of both the products shilled on TV and the soaps where tragedy is daily bread and butter. How shocked can a character truly be to hear they have a twin when a week earlier they found out they were adopted and a week later their wife is sleeping with her boss? But MH2 doesn't satirize soap operas the way the primetime Soap did, for example. It really is a soap and like many daytime soaps it has a talented cast (Mary Kay Place, Martin Mull) and delivers plot twists with relentless aplomb. But with Louise Lasser front and center with her deadpan - if not deadened -- delivery, you're always off-kilter. She hides under the sink and would seem a prime candidate for medication if she didn't already seem to be floating on a haze of prescription pills. Are they mocking TV or drugs to tweak your every move or both? Or neither? You could never really tell. And just when you're laughing the loudest Mary Hartman has a breakdown that's show-stopping and real. I think. When Lasser left, the show morphed into an ongoing soap with all the same characters and then even more oddly into a satire of talk shows that was brilliant in its own right long before Larry Sanders. This set from Shout contains the entire run of the original series before it shape-shifted into those variations. It's the show that became a national phenomenon, graced the covers of magazines, proved dearest to producer Norman Lear's heart and still leaves you flummoxed today as to how exactly you're supposed to react. How many shows even

now can say that?



The Mod Squad knew exactly what it was: an entertaining, would-be cool show with young people speaking jive and fighting crime in a multi-culti sort of way that was bold for primetime though obviously just catching up



with real America. It was blessed with a cast that was way cooler than the scripts or most of the crimes they faced, led by Clarence Williams III as Linc, Emmy winner Peggy Lipton as Julie and Michael Cole as Pete. It was explosively successful and then faded away just as quickly but for five years, it was ground-breaking. The show is dated now, but original fans will scarf this up and newcomers will be tickled by how hep it tried to be and the fact that the actors maintained their dignity throughout (a crucial factor in the show's success). This set contains all five seasons but not, alas, the reunion TV movie.

Gene Autry was also a ground-breaker on TV, though in his case it was commercial, making the

leap from films and becoming his own production company powerhouse with this and other TV shows. He experimented with color right from the start, produced an anthology series when an ongoing serial might have seemed easier to tackle and made barn-fuls of money doing it. I'm not sure who would beat or outdraw who in a fight: Autry or Roy Rogers. But of course the main point is that they would never fight in the first place; the bad guys always drew first and they were the good guys. *The Gene Autry Show* is interesting with its "contemporary" Westerns one week and episodes set decades earlier in others to shake things up, but again this is for those nostalgia buffs who enjoyed it in the first place.

WOLVERINE (\$39.99 BluRay; FOX)

DESPICABLE ME 2 (\$34.98 BluRay; Universal)

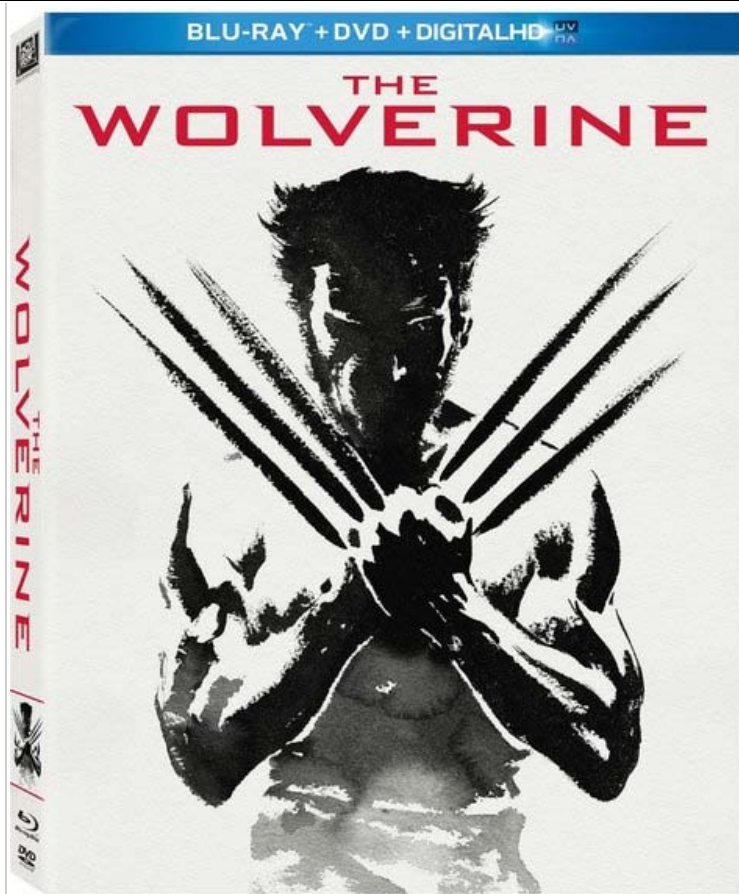
THE LONE RANGER (\$39.99 BluRay out December 17; Disney)

PRISONERS (\$35.99 BluRay out December 17; Warner Bros.)

THE ROOFTOP (\$29.98 BluRay; Well Go) -- Will there be another Wolverine movie? When this Hugh Jackman vehicle made more money than all the other X-Men movies but one, you bet there will be. Hopefully soon, they'll get the glowering/humor ratio just right and let Wolverine have a genuinely gripping tale that's not drenched in angst. Fat chance.

Despicable Me 3? Are you kidding me? Of course there will be, not to mention a spin-off movie with the scene-stealing little yellow guys, though since they're practically the main draw in the first place, I'm not sure the Minions need or want their own movie. (Or more to the point, certainly *Despicable Me* needs them.) *DM2* is similar to the mild first movie, but a little less so. Come to think of it, maybe an all-Minions movie can get a little *Gremlins* and start some much-needed mayhem. If this series has a problem, it's too much heart.

I'm one of the three people who didn't mind *The Lone Ranger*. Heck, I was really in the mood for a Western and I appreciated the tone throughout, which wasn't too jokey, or rather wasn't as jokey as I feared. It built to a clever action finale that was amusingly over the top and set to the music of the William Tell Overture in a very satisfying way. Indeed, the movie consistently raised the stakes with each set piece, pushing the believability



farther and farther until the nutty finale in a way that had an internal logic. I would have preferred...not a gritty Lone Ranger, but a more realistic one, I think. But the movie they made was certainly more coherent than the last few Pirates movies and those made \$1 billion each so why this suffered so is beyond me. If you're in the right frame of mind, give it a try.

Hugh Jackman enjoyed a commercial blockbuster with *Wolverine* and solid critical reviews for the low-budget *Prisoners*, a violent tale that has been hailed by critics for its ensemble cast, which also includes Jake Gyllenhaal and Viola Davis. For this story of a father trying to protect his family, the tension would surely have been greater at a shorter running time, but that battle seems to have been lost long ago in Hollywood. Today, two hours is considered short.

Finally, it's not a Hollywood blockbuster but *The Rooftop* is one of the nuttiest, most enjoyably offbeat flicks, with pop star, actor and director Jay Chou writing the tunes and starring in this tale of kids who live on rooftops in a major city and burst into song at the slightest provocation. Yes, they live on the roofs of buildings and sing and dance while they're at it. If this sounds remotely appealing to you, jump. Chou was born in the wrong era - what MGM might have done with his talents back in the day.

MARY POPPINS 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (\$39.99 BluRay; Disney)

ANCHORMAN: THE RICH MAHOGANY EDITION (\$26.98 DVD out December 14; Paramount)

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK (\$26.98 BluRay out December 17; Paramount) -- Perfectly timed to the making-of movie *Saving Mr. Banks* (a blandly sentimental film about P.L. Travers that wastes a good performance by Emma Thompson), here comes the 50th anniversary edition of *Mary Poppins*. First and foremost...well first and foremost is Julie Andrews practically perfect as the crisp, no-nonsense nanny. But I'd focus more on the Sherman Brothers, who delivered one of the best original movie musical scores in history (alongside their excellent work for *The Jungle Book*, their other masterpiece). The songs are clever, inventive, tuneful, smart and push the story forward or reveal character with ease. Like other family





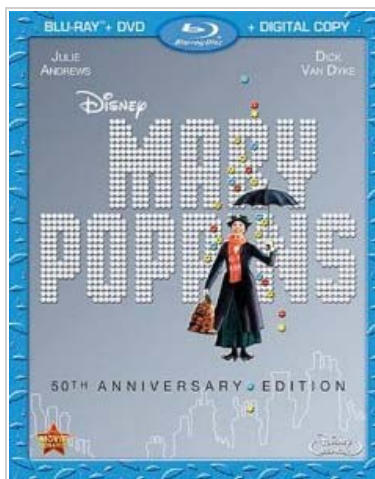
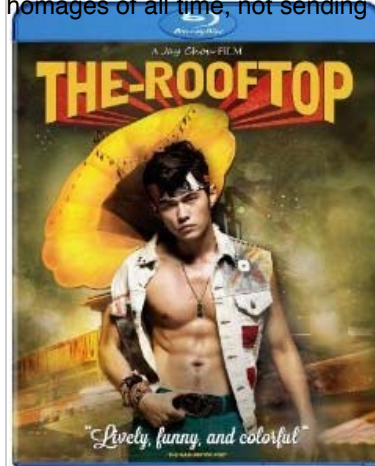
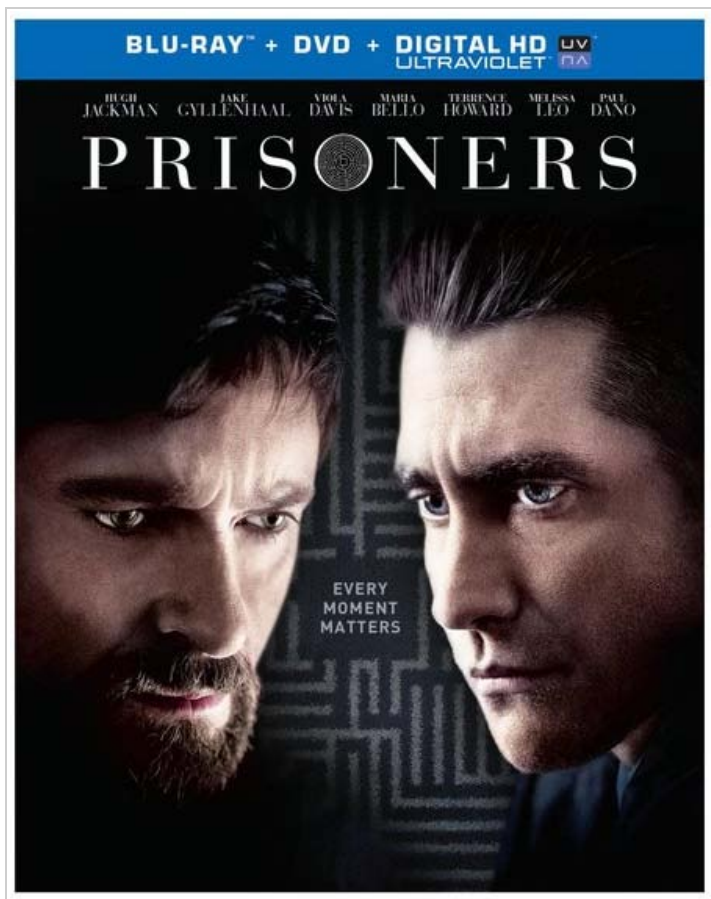
friendly fare (*The Sound Of Music* et al), it's often damned with faint praise but this is a great movie from its production design to broad performances (Dick Van Dyke keeps the romance between Bert and Mary Poppins at precisely the little boy crush it should be, for example) to those songs. It was indeed Walt Disney's final triumph and proved this showman had a lot more to give when he died.

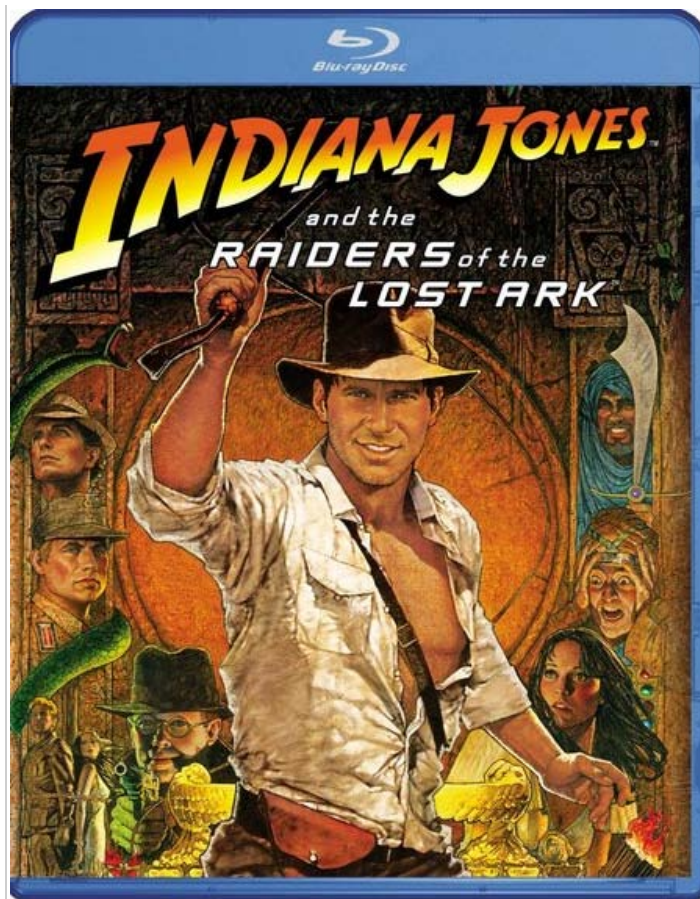
Also timed to a new movie is yet another edition of *Anchorman: The Legend Of Ron Burgundy*. If you already have the film on DVD or BluRay, there's certainly nothing here you need to so, though like every other excuse for a re-release of a film it has some exclusive content. The main draw is of course the movie about a competitive local news team, one of the bright spots on Will Farrell's resume. It's always smart to surround yourself with talent and he does that here with Paul Rudd and many others.

Franchises spark loyalty and a fierce sense of ownership, which is why I bristle and refuse to retitl one of my favorite movies of all time as *Indiana Jones and the Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. No, thank you. It's *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* and always will be. Twelve year old boys can be very stubborn and that's exactly how this adventure makes me feel, in the best sense of the idea: a 12 year old boy open to escapism and derring-do and even willing to worry that the hero might not make it, though of course he will. That's why Indy's teenage bickering with Marion (Karen Allen) is so pitch-perfect. They have a sexy moment or two, but Indy falls asleep just at the crucial moment and the movie gets a laugh and kids can relax and know the adult stuff will stay behind closed doors and the action will soon pick up again. This celebration of the Hollywood serial is one of the great homages of all time, not sending them up (like the sequel

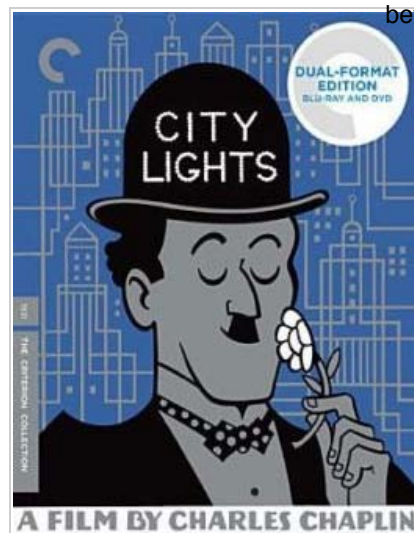
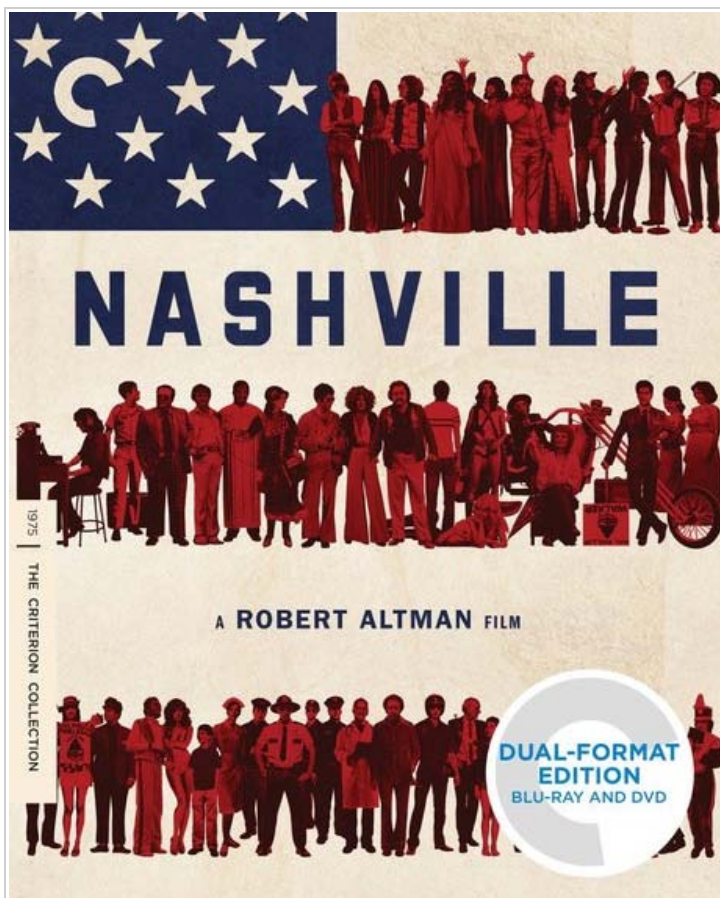
Temple Of Doom did) but creating the ultimate serial of them all. I find things to enjoy in the other editions of *Indiana Jones*, but in truth this is the only one you really need and it's now available on BluRay. So, now that Disney owns the rights, after Ford hangs up the whip (maybe one or two adventures from now) who's going to play Young Indy in the prequels set before *Raiders*? That's not heresy: Sean Patrick Flannery was very good in the TV series and River Phoenix was just as appealing in his cameo. There will be another Indy; it's just a matter of time.

NASHVILLE (\$39.95 BluRay/DVD out December 14; Criterion)
CITY LIGHTS (\$39.95 BluRay/DVD; Criterion)
GREY GARDENS (\$39.95 BluRay;



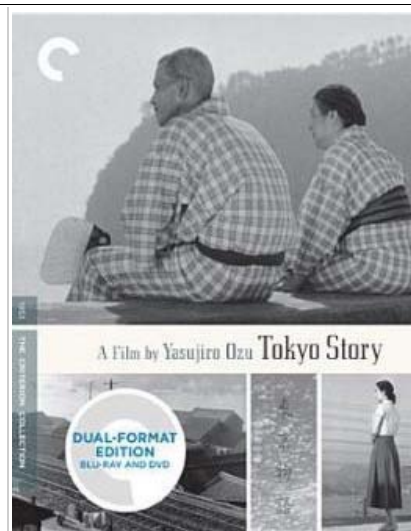
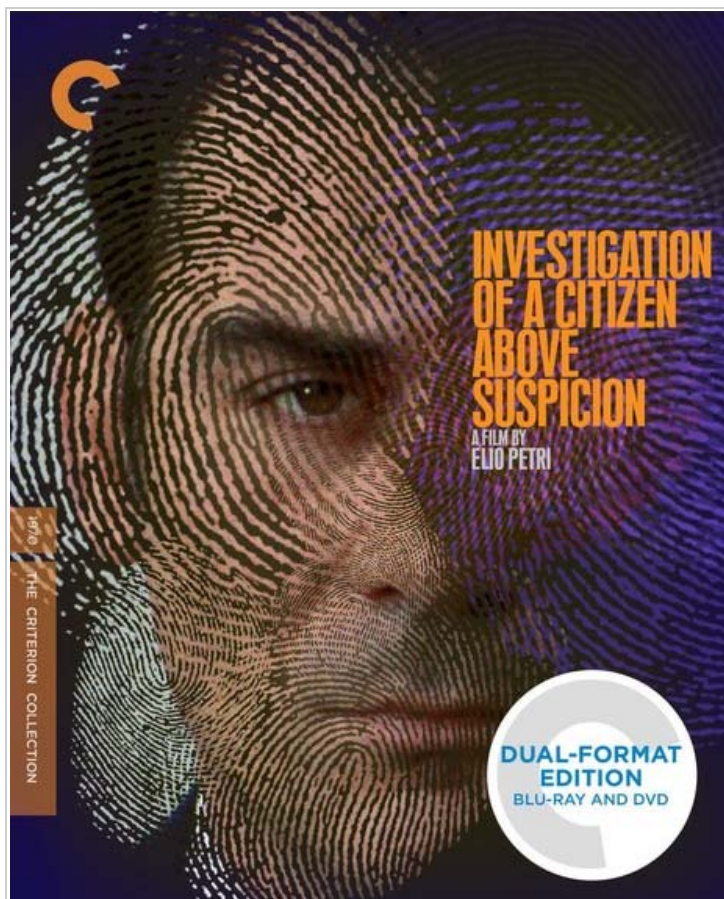
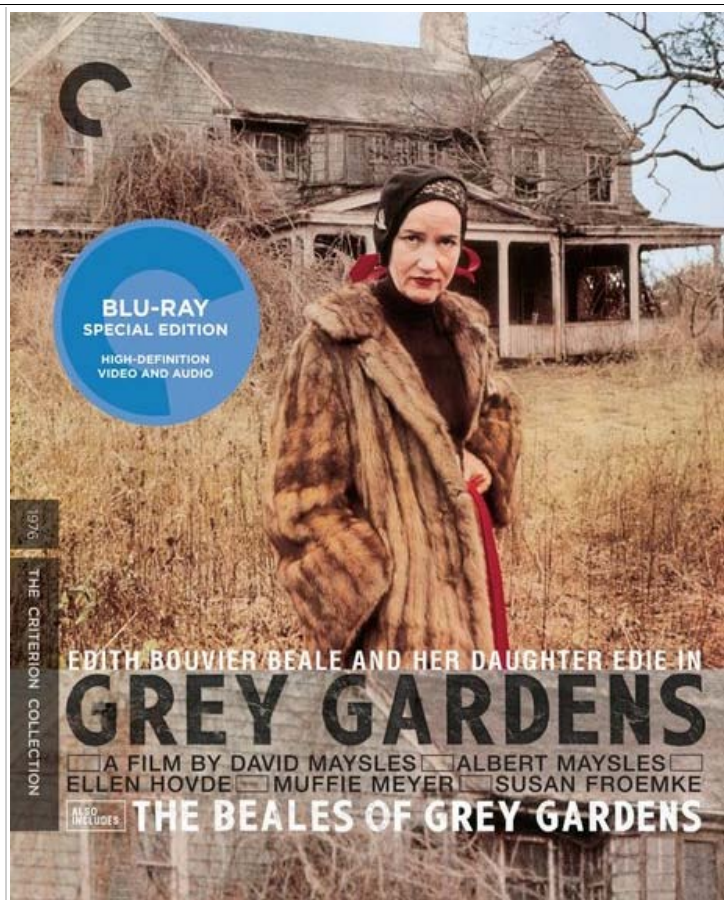


Criterion)
TOKYO STORY (\$39.95 BluRay/DVD; Criterion)
INVESTIGATION OF A CITIZEN ABOVE SUSPICION (\$39.95 BluRay/DVD; Criterion) -
 - If you've got a movie buff on your list, just give them something new from Criterion. You simply can't go wrong. In the past few weeks, as always, they've put on some new releases and you have to reach for the thesaurus to find enough superlatives to talk about the movies they're presenting with such care. Nashville may be my favorite Robert Altman film and it has simply never looked better. One side benefit of the switch from celluloid to digital in movie theaters (you may not have noticed, but film is officially dead at most multiplexes) is that every time they want to show any older movie they have to strike a new digital print and that usually means a 4K print with better detail than before. It's not



necessarily a restoration in the classic sense, but done with care it can mean a huge improvement over what's been available before. That's certainly true for this brilliant look at America as embodied by country music and the people in Nashville, both the stars and the wanna-bes, the lovers, the friends and the sycophants. It is sprawling and funny and scathing and moving and truly lives up to its reputation every time I see it. This Criterion edition is superlative and comes loaded with extras but the movie has absorbed my entire attention so I can't offer an opinion on them. Soon, I'll watch them. Soon.

Of course, many say Charlie Chaplin's best work was in his shorts (hmm, that didn't come out right) but if you're talking feature length films, *City Lights* has moved to the top of the list in recent decades. And no wonder, it's a pure delight, the crowning moment of glory for the Tramp and sentiment that is earned to say the least. Pure entertainment, with laughter and tears side by side as only Chaplin could deliver. Unlike *Nashville*, this has been taken great care of over the years, but this new edition is handsome nonetheless, if not



essential for someone with a recent version.

Unexpected comedy can be found in the haunting, eminently quotable documentary film *Grey Gardens*, which has been turned into a TV movie and a very good musical but remains unmissable here in its original form. A mother and a

daughter -- relatives of Jackie Kennedy -- live in glamorous squalor (and I do mean squalor) in their crumbling mansion. They opine on life, play for the camera, bicker with each other and astonish us at every turn. You watch it the first time in slack-jawed amazement, a second time to savor their hilarious one-liners and bits of wisdom and again and again after that like a totem. What's remarkable in retrospect is that the Maysles and others who filmed it never allowed these two eccentric women to become the butt of the film, which must have been awfully tempting.

Okay, now we're hitting four masterpieces in a row (I don't use the term lightly). This one is Ozu's masterpiece *Tokyo Story*. Like many of his other films, it quietly observes the dynamics of a family, in this case via the journey of two elderly parents who travel to Tokyo to visit their kids. In typical "cat in a cradle" fashion, the kids are too busy to pay them much attention. It was inspired by another masterpiece (*Make Way For Tomorrow*, also on Criterion) and while I personally would choose several other Ozu's as my favorite, this has become the de facto pick for his best and it's certainly typical, heart-breaking and very good. Needless to say, it's presented with care by Criterion and loaded with extras.

Finally, here's a Criterion release I won't call a masterpiece. Why? Simply because I've never seen it. It's the Italian drama *Investigation Of A Citizen Above Suspicion*. In this black crime drama about corruption (and does Italy know corruption!) a police chief murders his mistress and then idly wonders if anyone would ever charge him with the crime,. This leads him to dangle more and more obvious clues as his men either willfully or incompetently ignore the bread crumbs leading to their boss. It won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film and was hugely praised at the time and still considered highly notable. So chances are after I watch it, this will be masterpiece number five.

DOCTOR WHO: THE DAY OF THE DOCTOR (\$24.98 DVD; BBC)

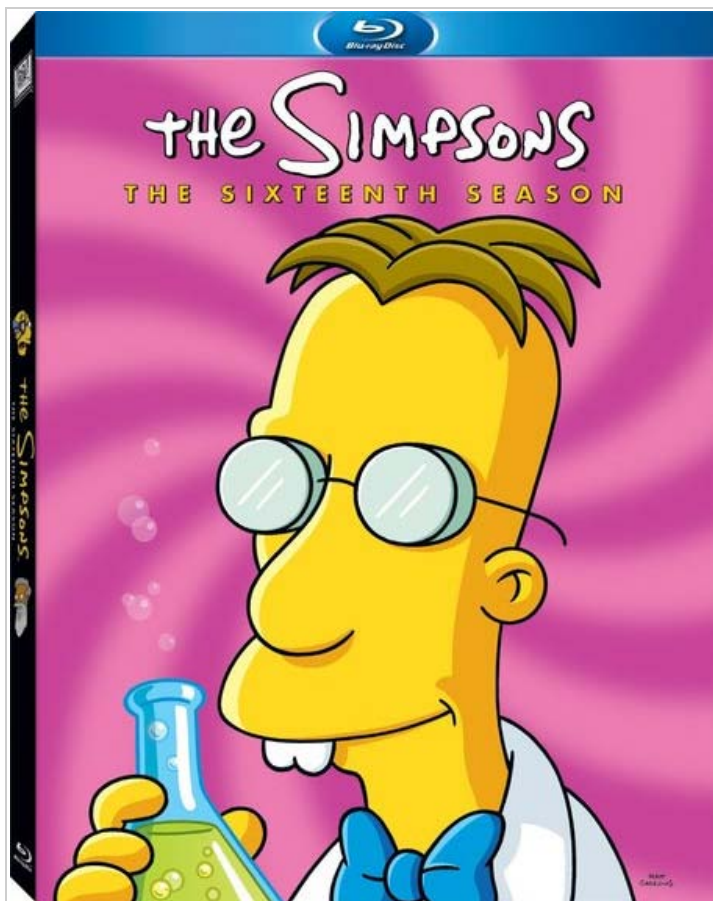
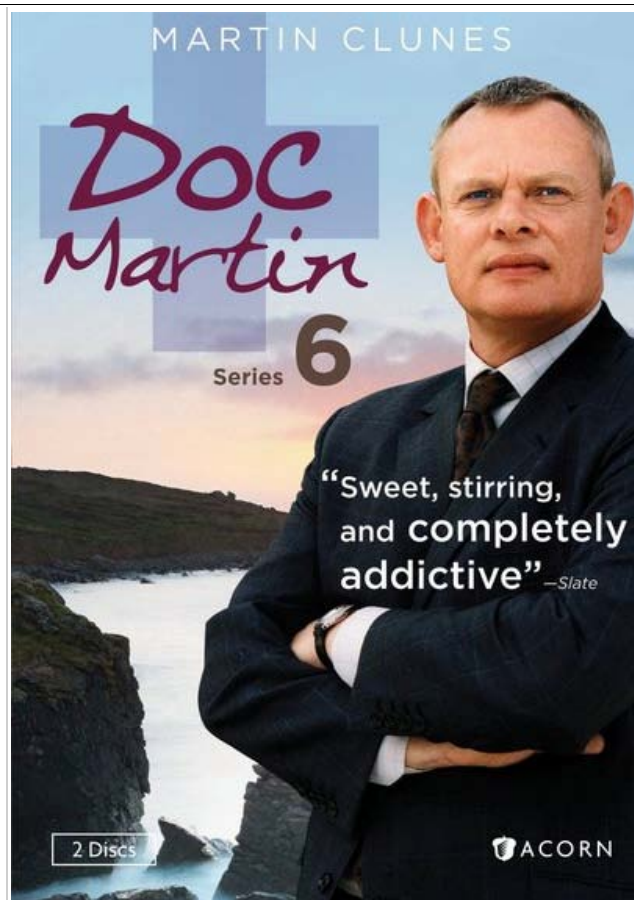
DOC MARTIN SERIES 6 (\$39.99 DVD; Acorn)

THE SIMPSONS SEASON 16 (\$59.99 BluRay; FOX)

LILYHAMMER SEASON ONE (\$29.95 BluRay; Cinedigm/Flatiron)

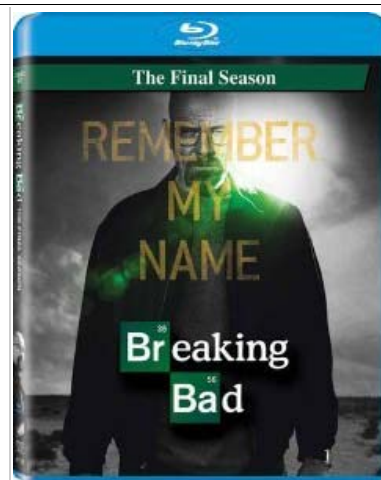
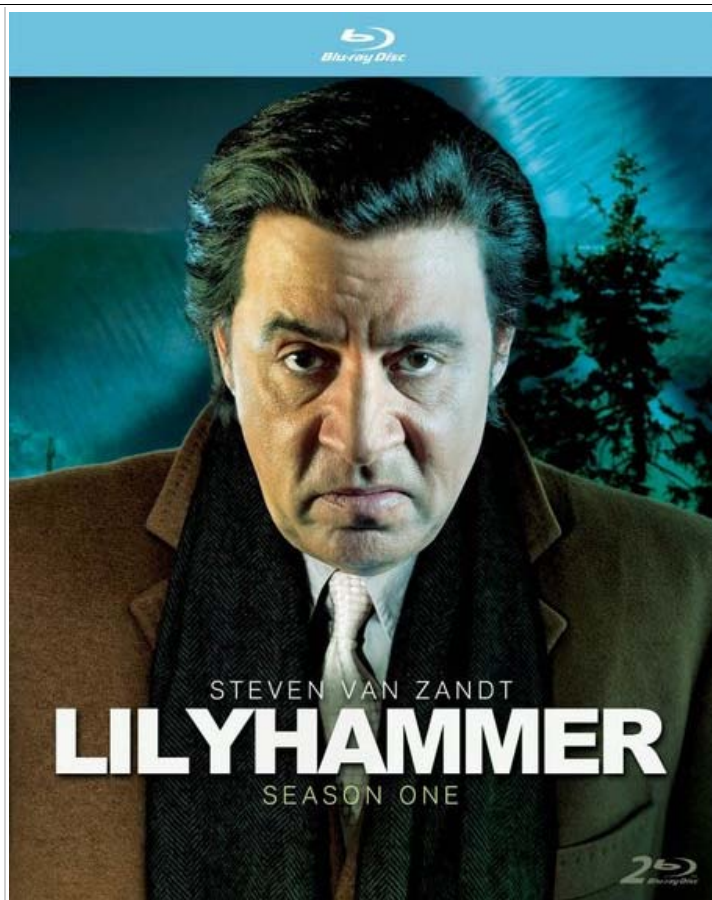
BREAKING BAD THE FINAL SEASON (\$65.99 BluRay; Sony)

GENE KELLY: DANCING, A MAN'S GAME -- OMNIBUS (\$29.98 DVD out December 17; eOne) -- In my house, *The Day Of The Doctor* was a very big deal. In a good stunt, the BBC aired the 50th anniversary special TV



movie about Doctor Who at exactly the same time all over the world. That way, everyone could watch this latest tale about the Doctor at exactly the same time. It was hugely successful, sparking huge ratings and even drawing people to movie theaters, where they spent \$10 million to watch a 3-D version over the next few days, even though presumably they'd seen it already! As for the episode itself, it was catnip for fans if not an ideal introduction to newcomers. (I might send newcomers to Series 6 for Matt Smith because it had the strongest most satisfying arc.) You got the current Doctor Matt Smith, loads of screen time for the previous Doctor David Tennant (it was especially fun to see how they played off one another) and one-off Doctor John Hurt as a heretofore unknown Doctor responsible in one time stream for a genocidal act that has haunted the Doctors ever since. The episode in typical sci-fi fashion revolved around whether that genocidal act that haunted the Doctors ever since should in fact take place. Ah, the joys of time travel. I enjoyed the darker edge of the Doctor in this reboot, but I'm pleased that this special points the way to a more satisfying, believable path for the essentially peace-loving Doctor. And there were lots of Doctors, from a tiny sliver of the next Doctor, to cameos from all the previous Doctors in one form or another down to an extended appearance from everyone's favorite Doctor of them all. It was satisfying family fare and a smart tweak to the storyline that has loomed over the last few years. Up next? A Christmas special with the next Doctor properly revealed, so we can all start debating what we think about him!

Doc Martin is surely one of the most frustrating show on TV. I really like the characters and the actors involved are terrific. But the show's writers are simply determined to do nothing but spin their wheels until the series finale when they'll presumably let the doc and his true love be happy....for a change. It's a simple fish out of water show with a grumpy big city doc forced to care for the eccentric people

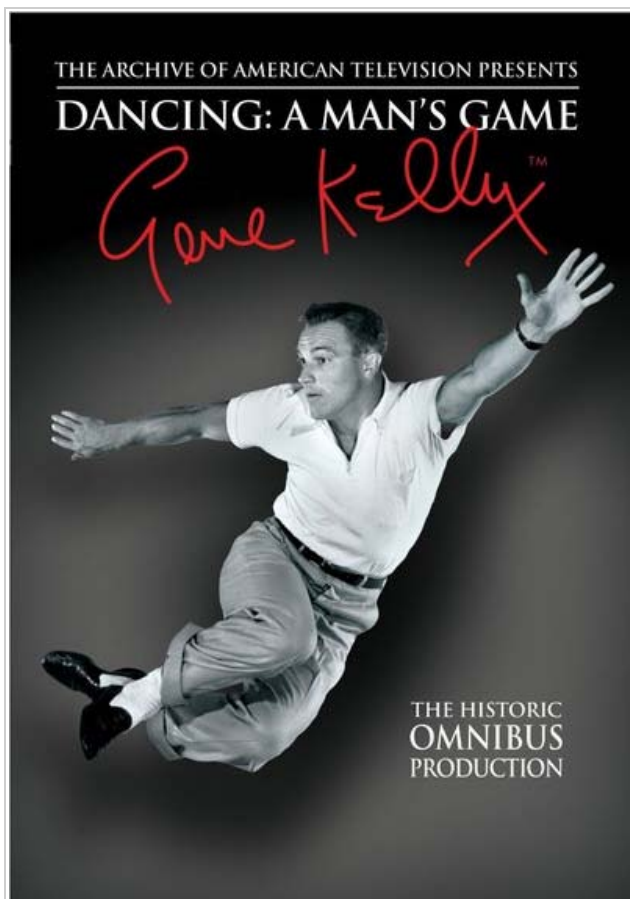


of a small village. Real doctors must watch the show with glee as Doc Martin tells patients to "shut up" without batting an eye and barks at their every stupidity. About once or twice a season he has an emotional breakthrough (in fairness, his parents were truly dreadful) and expresses his love but then things go right back to where they were. And

yet, I can't stop watching. For heavens' sake, they have one of the all-time great actors -- Eileen Atkins -- and barely give her anything to do. If you've never seen it, start at the beginning and you can yell at me later for getting you hooked on this frustrating but somehow still enjoyable show.

The Simpsons keeps going on and on long after its sell by date. But familiarity breeds indifference, so it's good to go back to an earlier season and get a real sense of the quality of the show. Season 16 wasn't so bad, as this BluRay set attests. It's not essential, the way the show was in its early days but it's not so rote as the series feels now. (Even cartoons can only go through the motions so many times.) And overall the series really has set a very high standard of excellence both in their picture and sound

quality and the voluminous extras.



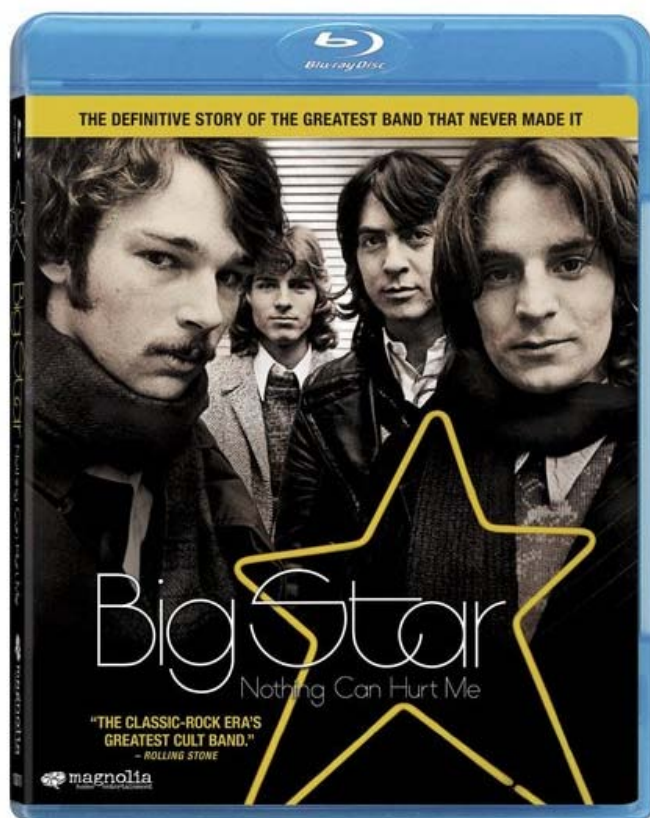
As long as he's free to tour whenever Bruce wants, I'm fine with Steven Van Zandt enjoying his second career as an actor. This is another fish out of water comedy: here he plays a new mobster but essentially it's the same guy from the Sopranos, but he's been sent to Norway in the witness protection program. Rural America would be bad enough, but rural Norway? Needless to say, this eccentric series has our hero butting heads with the locals as he tries to adapt to their strange customs, such as politeness. It's modest stuff, but delivered in a low-key manner that makes it enjoyable as is.

Breaking Bad stumbled a bit in Season Five as Walt became such a monster. But it delivered a great finale where Walt found his humanity again WITHOUT betraying the character arc they so carefully constructed over the past six years. It will be fascinating to watch the entire series in years to come and see how it plays in one fell swoop, especially when you know where it's going. But *Breaking Bad* is unquestionably a great TV series. Like *The Wire*, it is essential viewing for anyone who wants to be TV literate. (Is there such a thing? Yes, there is!)

Gene Kelly I'm sure was a delightful, happy man in his private life. But he's always struck me as terribly insecure about his manhood. He simply never got over the fact that his one great talent was dancing and that, to him, dancing simply wasn't very masculine. You can see it in his style of dancing, in his choreography, in his every manner and gesture. He seems always determined to be muscular and virile and strong and even his swooning romantic gestures are the gestures of a man who is choosing to be swooning and romantic to get the girl or self-conscious about said romanticism and cloaks it in the mantle of "classical," hi-falutin' ballet. It's why I've always preferred the effortless masculinity of Fred Astaire. You can't imagine Astaire feeling the need to insist that dancing was masculine; he enjoyed dancing, so he did it. But in 1958 Kelly oversaw and starred in a TV special specifically created to tell the world that dancing was "a man's game," and he

proved it was manly and strong (and not effeminate in the least!) by bringing in a host of major athletes to join him. He's an artist so there are moments of pleasure and it's certainly fun to see Mickey Mantle, Sugar Ray Robinson, Johnny Unitas and

Dick Button (a figure skater! Gene, if there's anything less manly than dancing in your eyes, surely it was figure skating?) joining Kelly in his endeavor to make clear once and for all that dancing is not for girls. But this may be the only primetime TV special devoted to a movie star trying to get a chip off his own shoulder.



BIG STAR: NOTHING CAN HURT ME (\$29.98

BluRay; Magnolia)

THE RUTLES ANTHOLOGY (\$24.95 BluRay/DVD;

VSC/Broadway Video)

GOOD OL' FREDA (\$26.98 BluRay; Magnolia)

THE STONE ROSES: MADE OF STONE (\$19.95

BluRay; MVD) -- Four documentaries that revolve around music. They're all strictly for fans of the bands involved but worthwhile for those who care. Big Star is one of the great should-have-beens, a 1970s purveyor of great power pop/rock songs led by Alex Chilton and Chris Bell that flamed out before it got remotely the attention it deserved. The documentary *Nothing Can Hurt Me* tells their tale with smarts and while mostly fans will watch anyone unfamiliar with them will probably be buying their music the minute it's over. Everyone should be a fan of the Beatles. If you're a fan of the Beatles and Monty Python, then the Rutles is your idea of heaven. Eric Idle's mockumentary was wickedly amusing at the time and has held up rather well, actually. Here you get both mockeries, along with modest extras that might entice fans who bought them before. A documentary about the secretary for the Beatles sounds like "no stone unturned" in the desire to discuss simply everything about the Fan Four, but *Good Ol' Freda* proves endearing nonetheless, a sweet sidelong glance at the lads as they explode into fame and what it looked like to the people around them. Finally, *Made Of Stone* is a love letter from the director Shane Meadows to the great UK band Stone Roses as they reunited for some concerts decades after their brilliant debut in 1989. This is strictly for fans, especially since bonus features do not include a complete concert as one would hope. Still, Meadows does catch some performance highlights that make you kick yourself for missing them the second time around.

BRUCE WEBER: THE FILM COLLECTION (\$59.95

DVD; Docurama)

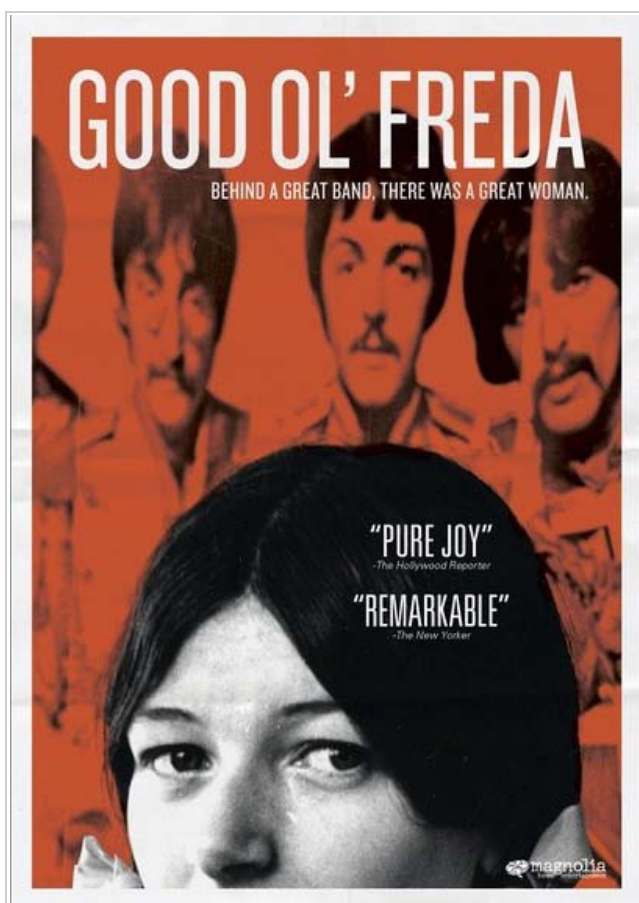
THE GHOST AND MRS. MUIR (\$24.99 BluRay; FOX)

CARMEN JONES (\$24.99 BluRay; FOX)

THE BLACK SWAN (\$24.99 BluRay; FOX)

CALL OF THE WILD (\$24.99 BluRay; FOX) -- Bruce Weber is of course an iconic photographer who has pursued an increasingly eccentric vision in documentary films. When he gazes outward, Weber is on steady ground. Thus, *Broken Noses* (a film about boxing) and *Let's Get Lost* (a film about the dilapidated jazz legend Chet Baker) are very good idea. But the silly *Chop Suey* (in which the distractingly handsome Peter Johnson sits at the feet of his betters and listens to their stories) and *A Letter To True* (an ode to his dogs) are fatuous fare, best left as home movies. You feel almost mean saying so, since they're so open-hearted and sincere; it's like making fun of a teenager's diary. But he's a better artist than that they're unworthy of him. The Film Collection contains all four, so you don't have to choose and if he (and Peter Johnson) should come over, you won't have any explaining to do.

The Ghost And Mrs. Muir is a Hollywood classic. The gimmick -- the ghost of a sea captain woos a lonely single woman living in his lighthouse) could have been pitched to any studio last week. But it's handled with such intelligence and restraint and the lead performances by Rex Harrison and Gene Tierner are so subtle and sweet and affecting that it raises the



entire film up. The capper is a romantic score by Bernard Herrmann that is one of his all-time greats and yes, that's saying something.

Dorothy Dandridge didn't get the career she deserved, but she made the most of *Carmen Jones*, an Oscar-nominated breakthrough in which she seduces Harry Belafonte right out from under his fiancée. It's the film version of the stage musical by Oscar Hammerstein, with song lyrics set to the music of Bizet's opera. Pearl Bailey is also a welcome sight but for Dandridge, after an Oscar nomination it was all downhill from here.

I'm less fond of *The Black Swan*. Tyrone Power as a pirate or anything else never interested me. But fiery Maureen O'Hara as a kidnapped woman who will butt heads with Power and undoubtedly fall in love with both him and his cause? Now that's worth setting sail for.

Finally, Clark Gable is practically the screen embodiment of Jack London's ideal male, a man's man who is self-sufficient, comfortable outdoors, but intelligent enough to woo a woman when the time is right. So he's perfect casting for *Call Of The Wild*, a glossy Hollywood take on London's glossy literary take on the Yukon territory and the sled dogs that were torn between serving a faithful master (when they could be found) and the call of the wild. It's all entertaining hokum and the movie throws in Loretta Young as the gal to civilize Gable, or at least have fun trying. Needless to say, this gift makes the perfect warning for kids who where Gable's character is slaughtered by natives and goes for a happy ending instead.

BOSTON RED SOX 2013 WORLD SERIES COLLECTOR'S EDITION (\$69.99 BluRay; A&E/Lionsgate) -- If for some sad reason you're a Boston Red Sox fan, this set brings together season highlights and all six games of the first Boston World Series to be won at home since 1918. If you're a saner person and a Yankee fan, this gift makes the perfect warning for kids who might be prone to naughtiness. Why threaten them with coal when you can threaten them by saying you'll stuff their stocking with the Boston Red Sox victory and force them to watch it?

Most titles listed here will be available in multiple

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF
THIS IS ENGLAND

THE STONE ROSES **MADE OF STONE**

A SHANE MEADOWS FILM



formats and in multiple combinations, including DVD, Blu-ray, digital download, video on demand, streaming and the like. The format listed is the format provided for review, not all the formats available. It is often the most expensive version with the most extras. Do check individual titles for availability in all their various guises and price points.

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