



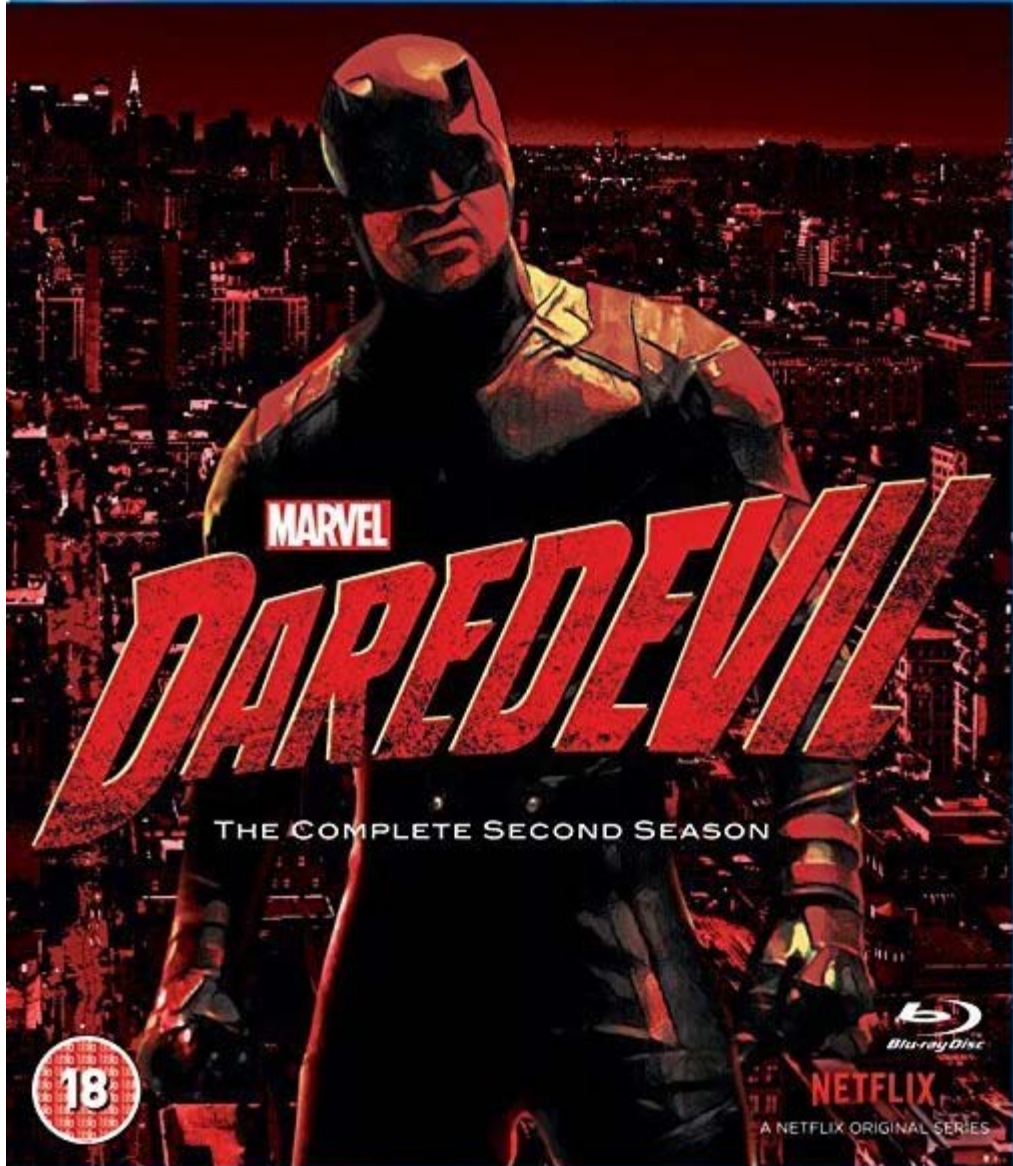
Michael Giltz, Contributor BookFilter creator

DVD: Comic Book Movies and TV Shows Keep Coming and Coming, "Baywatch," "Maurice" & More

09/08/2017 11:14 pm ET

I know, you're sick of super hero movies. And TV shows. And sequels and spin-offs. Yet they keep coming. Has Hollywood run out of ideas? Well, they always do. Remember westerns? Once upon a time, westerns dominated popular culture in a way that makes super hero movies seem positively tame. After dominating cinema in the 1940s and 1950s, they moved into TV. You could still see a lot of westerns at the movies in 1958 (though with Jayne Mansfield starring in *The Sheriff Of Fractured Jaw*, they were clearly getting a little desperate). But on TV, the western was king. Four of the top five TV shows on the air were westerns and seven of the top 10 (and one of the remaining shows was about farmers). Indeed 14 of the top 30 shows were westerns — but that included comedies and dramas, family shows, crime shows, soap operas of a sort and the like. Still, with the top 10 featuring *Gunsmoke*, *Wagon Train*, *Have Gun Will Travel*, *The Rifleman*, *Maverick*, *Tales Of Wells Fargo* and *The Life & Legend of Wyatt Earp*, some folk must have despaired every time they turned on the TV and heard a six shooter or saw a stagecoach pop into view. And truly, the heyday of the Western lasted literally decades. So if you're expecting comic book movies and TV shows to wear out their welcome any time soon, you may be backing the wrong horse.

Blu-ray Disc

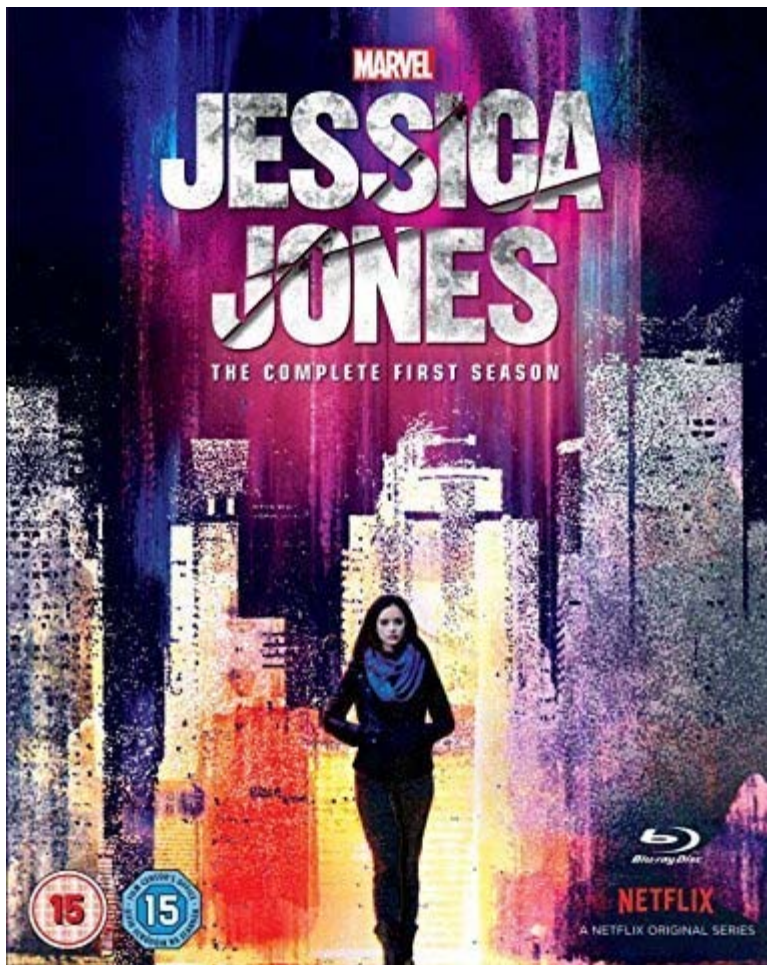


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Blu-ray Disc

NETFLIX

A NETFLIX ORIGINAL SERIES

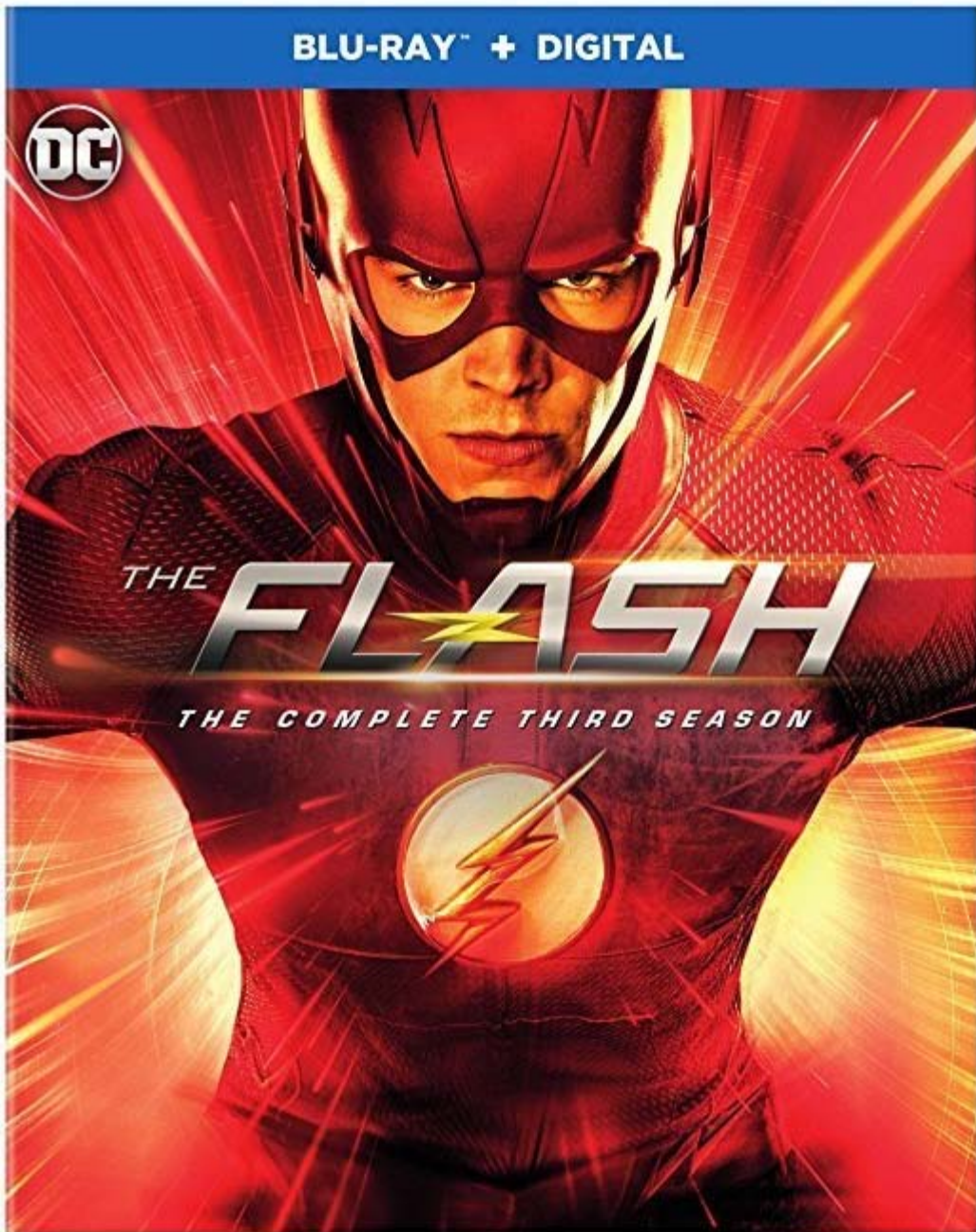


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THE *FLASH*

THE COMPLETE THIRD SEASON



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THE COMPLETE SECOND SEASON



SUPergirl



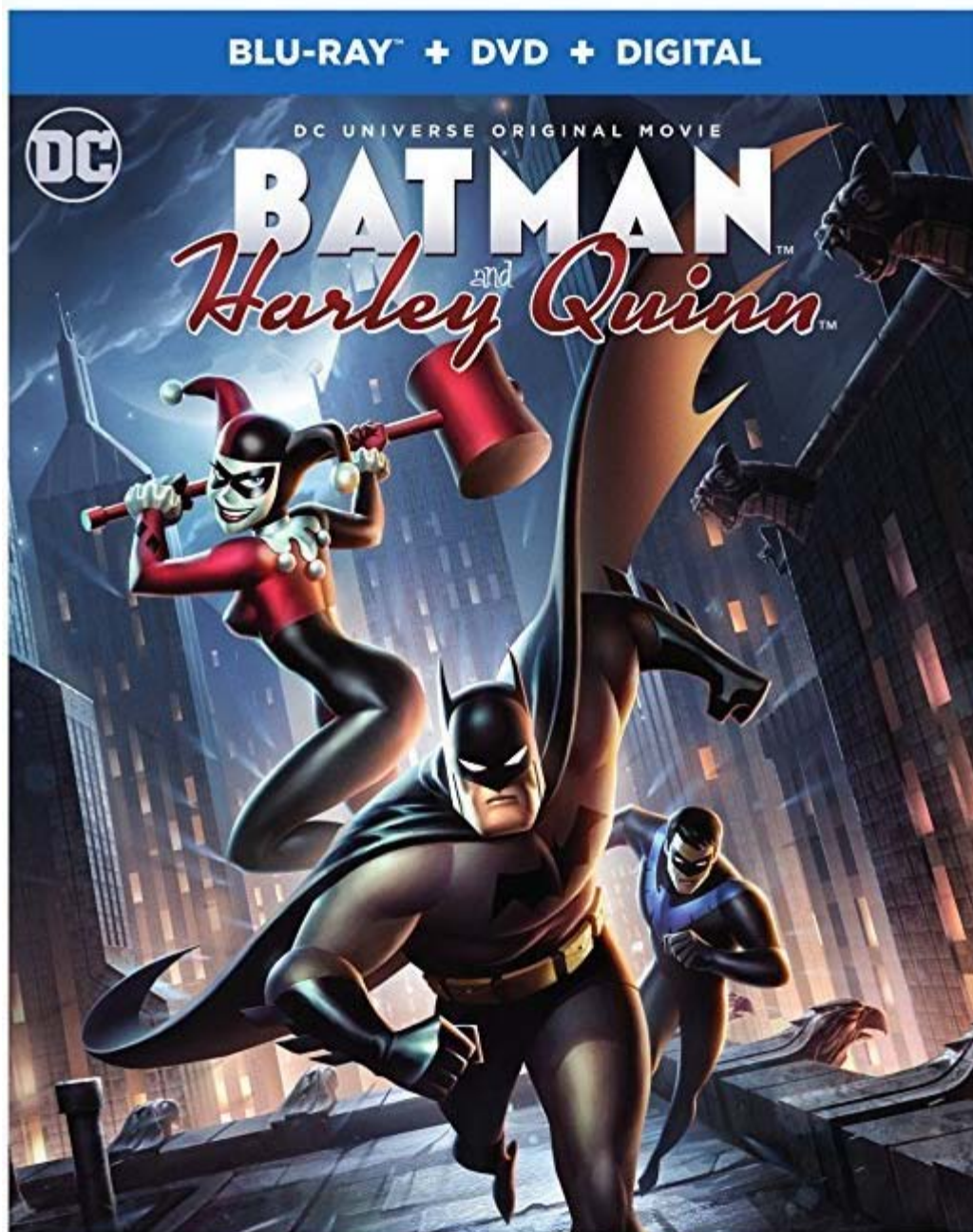
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THE COMPLETE THIRD SEASON
GOTHAM





DAREDEVIL SEASON TWO (\$49.99 BluRay; Walt Disney Studios)

JESSICA JONES SEASON ONE (\$29.99 BluRay; Walt Disney Studios)

THE FLASH COMPLETE THIRD SEASON (\$54.97 BluRay; Warner Bros)

SUPERGIRL COMPLETE SECOND SEASON (\$44.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

GOTHAM COMPLETE THIRD SEASON (\$39.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

BATMAN AND HARLEY QUINN (\$19.99 DVD; Warner Bros.)

Of all the new comic book TV shows, *Daredevil* had one of the most promising first seasons, thanks to a dark adult tone and a great villain. Season two was fine but as *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* proved time and time again, a Big Bad really helps. Still, it feels like Shakespeare compared to the tone of most comic book shows and that should help *Daredevil* in the long run.

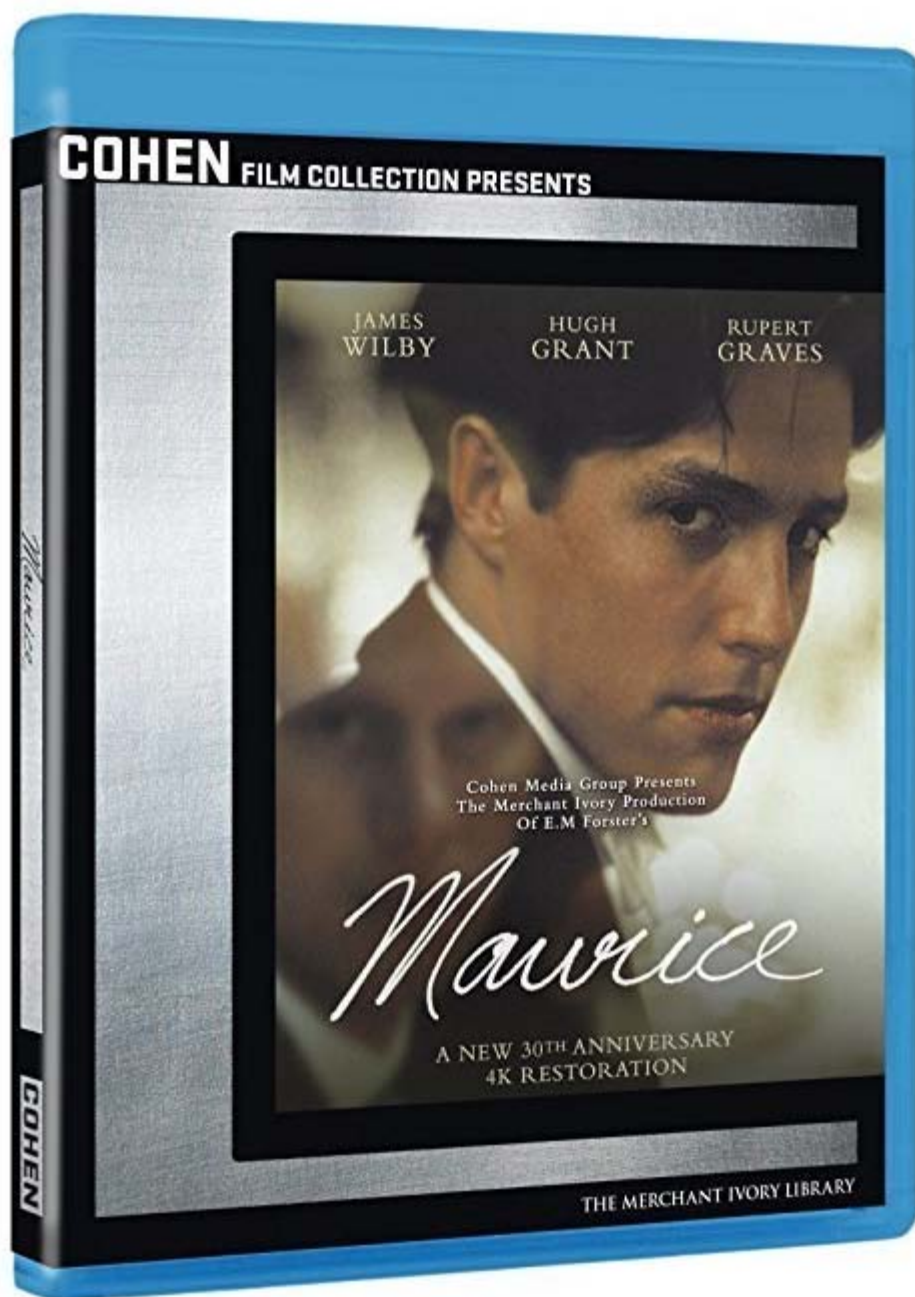
That same vibe of seriousness pervades *Jessica Jones*. Heck, you'd almost think this was DC! The one-time superhero turned private eye investigates crimes involving the (very) powerful, as in other caped crusaders. Casting is key here, with Krysten Ritter excelling as Jones, Carrie-Ann Moss solid as lesbian attorney Jeri Hogarth and one-time Doctor David Tennant an especially valuable assist as the empathy-inducing baddie Kilgrave. Truly, the strong bench of actors on a lot of these shows is the secret weapon that keeps them watchable. With just thirteen episodes a season, it's proven very easy to lure top talent to don tights.

Both *The Flash* and *Supergirl* are much lighter fare. The big news for these two shows was the cross-over musical episode. While no *Buffy* Season Six opener, thanks to the stellar cast ready to burst into song, it was a lot of fun indeed. Grant Gustin is an appealing everyman/superhero and fits in with the relatively light tone. (It almost makes me think of *The Greatest American Hero* at times.) If you like what they're offering, season three will please. *Supergirl* is more of a mess and they haven't figured it out yet. The tone is light, of course, with a dash of (pseudo?) feminism thanks to Calista Flockhart's mentoring of our hero, played by Melissa Benoist. Many of these shows have complex, exhausting season-long storylines. But *Supergirl* combines that with equally complex soap opera plotting and it all feels like overkill. Supergirl's earthly sister realizes she's a lesbian, her unbelievably hunky assistant (Jeremy Jordan) realizes they'll never be more than friends and falls for another woman...who immediately becomes a super villain and so on. And on. Maybe season three will find the show hitting its stride but I'm not holding my breath.

Always on firmer foot was *Gotham*. I credit the very likable Ben McKenzie who was the breakout star of *The O.C.*, the lead in the fine cop show *Southland* and is now the righteous center of the nonsense that is *Gotham*. He lets you take it all very seriously indeed, no matter how out there it gets. Very few actors have been the linchpin of three hit series and McKenzie is only 38 years old! He should rival Michael Landon and a few others as one of the biggest success stories in TV history. Season Three is where the show really came into its own. They proved no one was safe because if a villain we considered to be an iconic character was killed off, we realized that might just inspire someone else to arrive and pick up the mantle of that rogue, just as multiple people have played Batman and Robin in the comic books. (It ain't always Bruce Wayne, you know.) And of course season three had a great villain with Cameron Monaghan Emmy-worthy and magnetic as Jerome Valeska, aka the Joker. That baddie always brings out the best in everyone and he most certainly did here, turning *Gotham* from a fun diversion to appointment TV.

Also surprising was the best animated DC movie in a while, *Batman and Harley Quinn*. Just as Disney used straight-to-DVD spin-offs and sequels to give new directors and writers a low-risk shot, Warner Bros. should be using their essentially straight-to-video/DVD/streaming service of your choice projects as a testing ground for some animated feature film with a big, big budget. If so, they've found a winner with *Batman and Harley Quinn*, which harkens back to the classic 90s cartoon take on Batman dubbed *Batman: The Animated Series*

(considered the best iteration of Batman ever by some aficionados) and has good fun with the irrepressible psycho Quinn without diminishing her into comic relief. That TV show's guiding light was Bruce Timm and he's on board as a co-writer. Director Sam Liu is an asset, as is co-writer Jim Krieg. But is Warner Bros. really making the most of Timm with all these projects geared solely to hardcore fans and invisible to most everyone else?





the WEDDING BANQUET

*Everyone wants to
kiss the bride...
except the groom.*



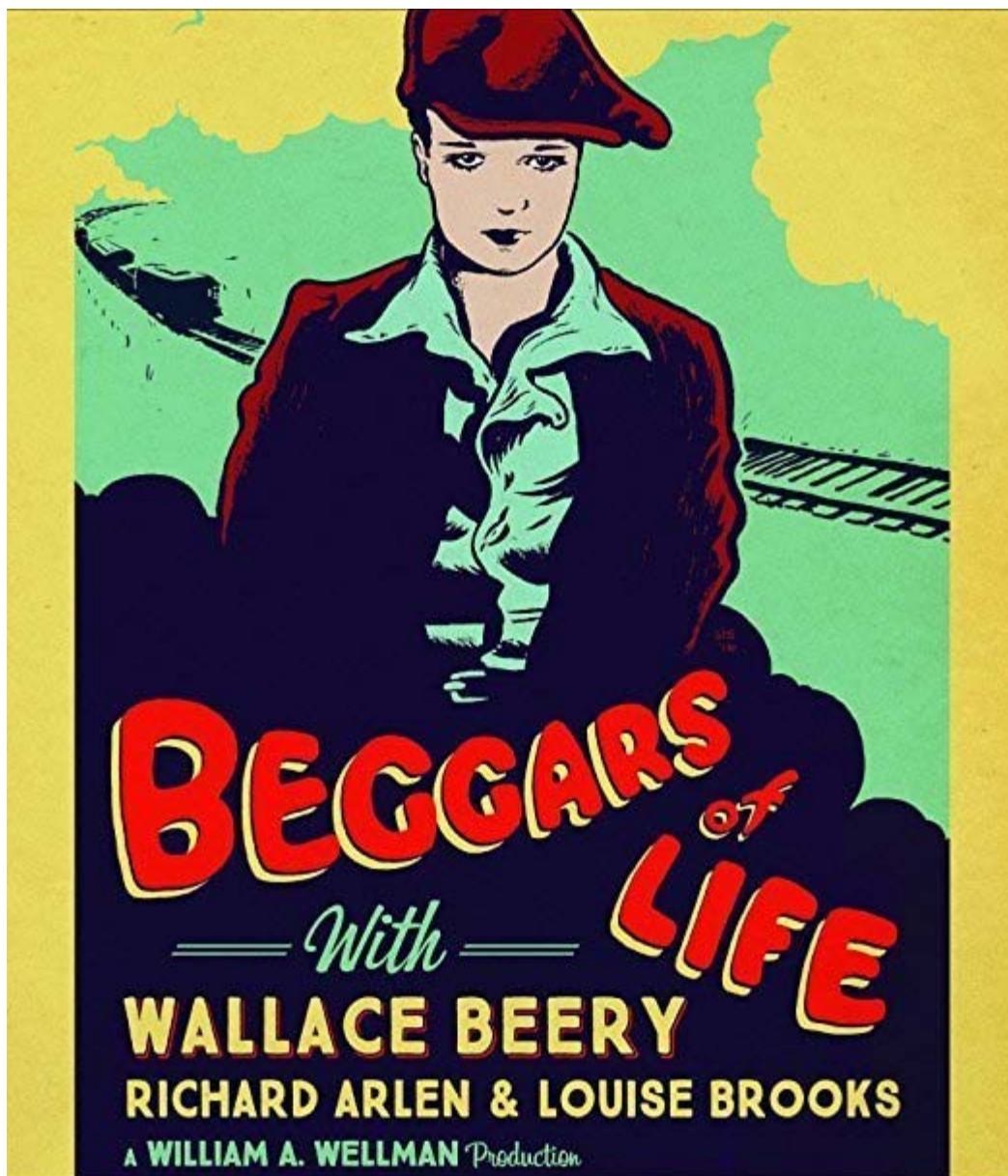
KINO
CLASSICS

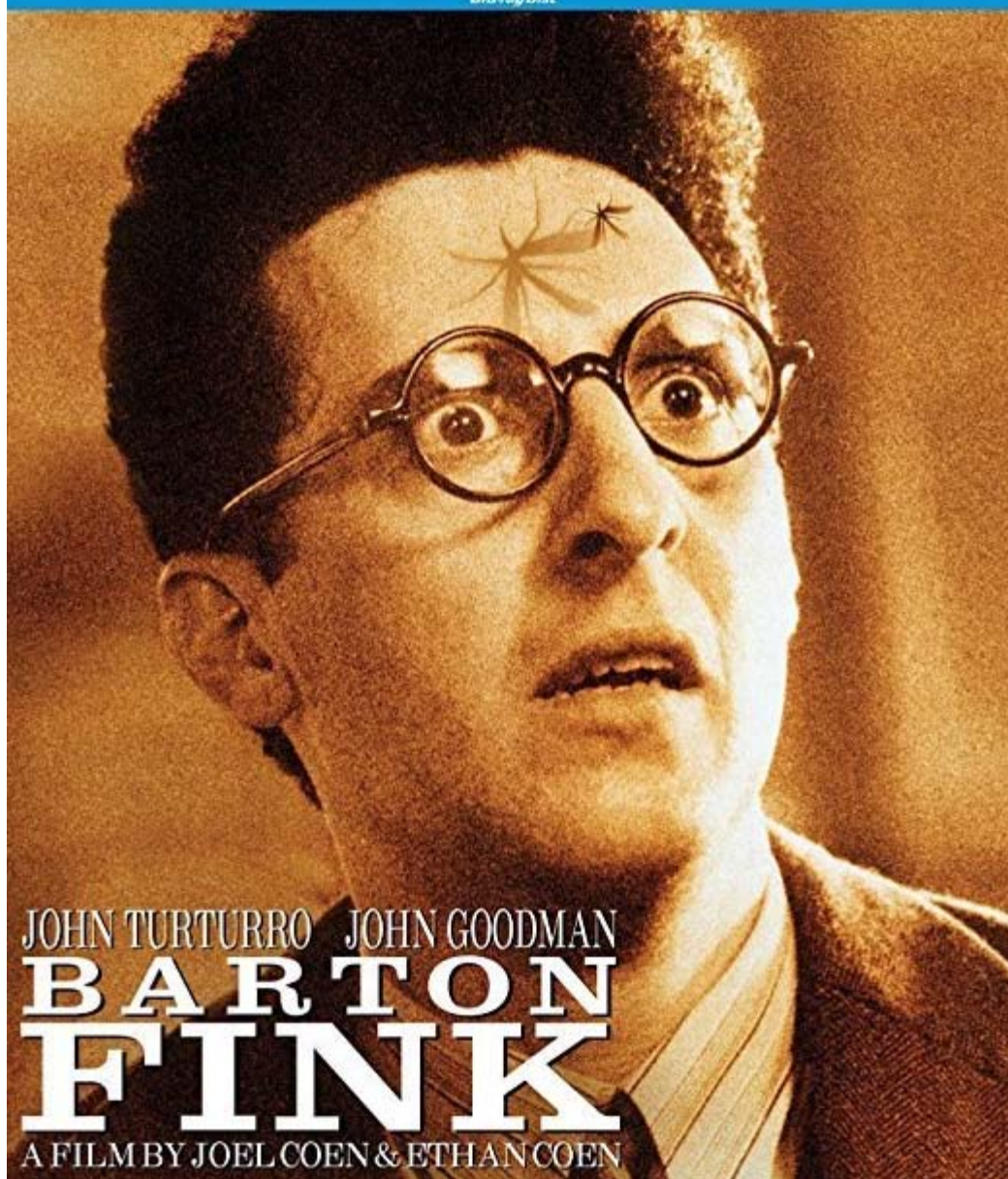
F. W. Murnau
MURNAU STIFTUNG

EMIL JANNINGS
LYA DE PUTTI

VARIÉTÉ



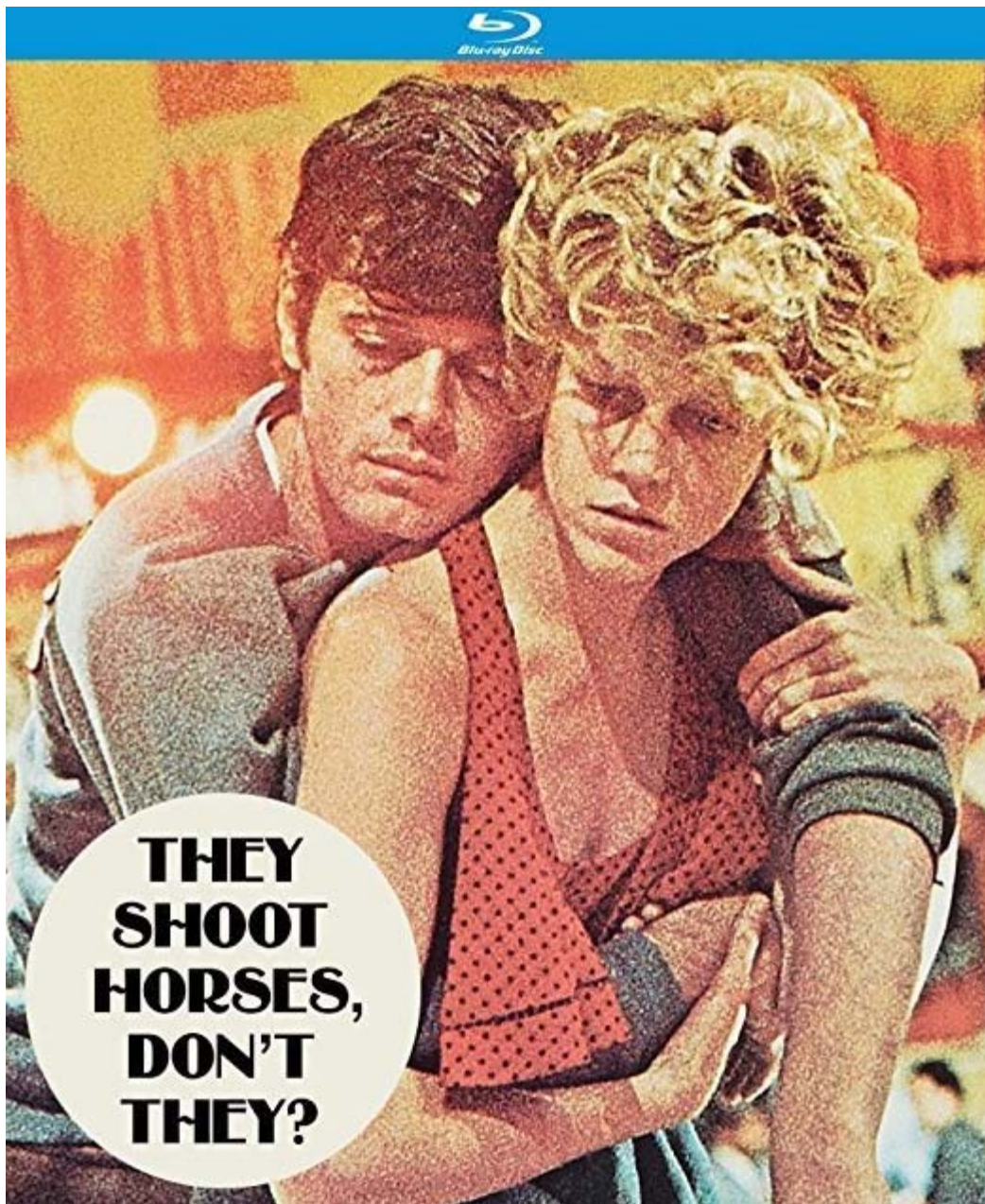




JOHN TURTURRO JOHN GOODMAN

BARTON FINK

A FILM BY JOEL COEN & ETHAN COEN



MAURICE 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (\$30.99 BluRay; Cohen Film Collection/Sony Pictures)

THE WEDDING BANQUET (\$29.95 BluRay; Olive Films)

VARIÉTÉ (\$19.99 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

BEGGARS OF LIFE (\$29.99 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

BARTON FINK (\$19.99 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY? (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

It's perfect timing for a new edition of bittersweet gay classic *Maurice*. The novel by E.M. Forster wasn't

published until 1971, one year after its author died. (He never even tried to get it in print, assuming such a frank novel was a dead letter.) And only the extraordinary success of the movie *A Room With A View* allowed the team of Merchant-Ivory to get a film adaptation made in 1987. It is, to be honest, more earnest than successful. But Hugh Grant and James Wilby bring a lot more passion to their roles than you found in, say, *Making Love* just a few years earlier. And certain scenes have an iconic power, namely the gardener Scudder (Rupert Graves) climbing into the bedroom window of Maurice and saying, "I know, sir, I know!" as they begin to go at it. It certainly paved the way for *Brokeback Mountain*. And now James Ivory — who co-wrote the screenplay — gets to have a role as screenwriter in this year's gay romance *Call Me By Your Name*, certain to be an arthouse hit and even a bit of a shocker given its May-December romance between a 17 year old teenager and a 24 year old scholar. Always intentionally gauzy in the style of romances since movies began, Maurice has never looked better and includes some fine new extras celebrating its existence.

Surely Forster would be flummoxed by something like *The Wedding Banquet*. This romantic comedy has great fun with the impending nuptials of two gay men and the culture/sexual/gender clash that ensues. Director Ang Lee rescues the light premise with a seriousness of purpose that makes it more fun and more moving than you might initially expect.

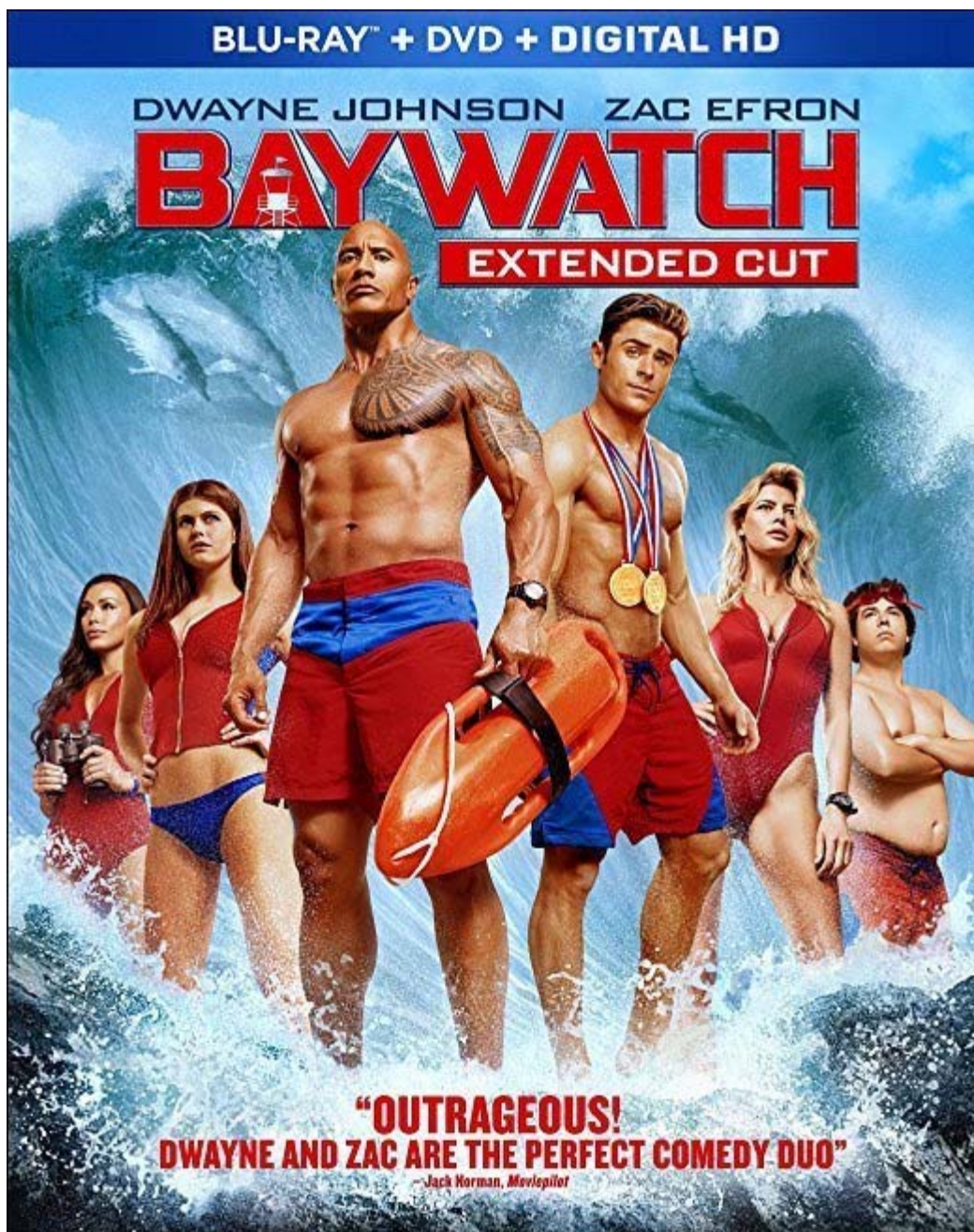
Completely unknown to me, the silent German film *Variété* stars the great Emil Jannings as a carnival barker who loses everything when he becomes hopelessly obsessed with one of the female performers. It's no *Blue Angel* but Jannings is great and the camerawork by Karl Freund is sensational. When sound came and bulky microphones meant cameras were essentially locked into place, it's no wonder the static visual boredom of early talkies seemed like a dreadful step backwards. Watch this to see what people were missing when sound ruined everything (for a while).

I was lucky to see *Beggars Of Life* in a theater. This early hit by director William Wellman has a great turn by Wallace Beery and a magnetic performance by Louise Brooks. Made in 1928, it captures the hoboos of the Great Depression with compassion. Brooks is a girl who ran away from her violent home and dresses as a boy to avoid danger. She partners up with a fellow hobo, a romance blossoms and then come vicious clashes with Beery and his gang. It's got verve and even a few spoken lines, since this mostly silent film has some dialogue as studios began the switchover to talkies. Luckily, not enough of that is bothered with to spoil the fun of an exciting top-of-the-train finale.

Joel and Ethan Cohen have such a varied and growing body of work, you can track the critical appreciation for their various works like some elaborate, cinematic stock exchange. Surely *Fargo* — at or near the top for most — has been buttressed even further thanks to the acclaimed TV series it inspired. Meanwhile, the once beloved *Raising Arizona* seems to have fallen from the radar while dark horse gem *Miller's Crossing* holds steady. And *Inside Llewyn Davis* shot up so quickly it may be due for a correction. Then there's *Barton Fink*. This ode to Hollywood pairs well with the amusing trifle *Hail, Caesar!* but *Fink* is darker and greater. Beloved by critics from the day it premiered at Cannes, this one hasn't lost its value one bit.

In contrast, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* is almost perennially overlooked by fans of director Sydney

Pollack and star Jane Fonda. It was a huge success when it opened, setting an unwelcome record for most Oscar nominations for a movie that was NOT nominated for Best Picture. It's been overlooked ever since, rarely garnering more than a passing mention in the acting career of Fonda or the directing career of Pollack. That's a shame since it's easily one of Pollack's best (not a long list) and Fonda's turn as a desperate woman in a marathon dance contest was what turned her from sexpot Barbarella to actress.



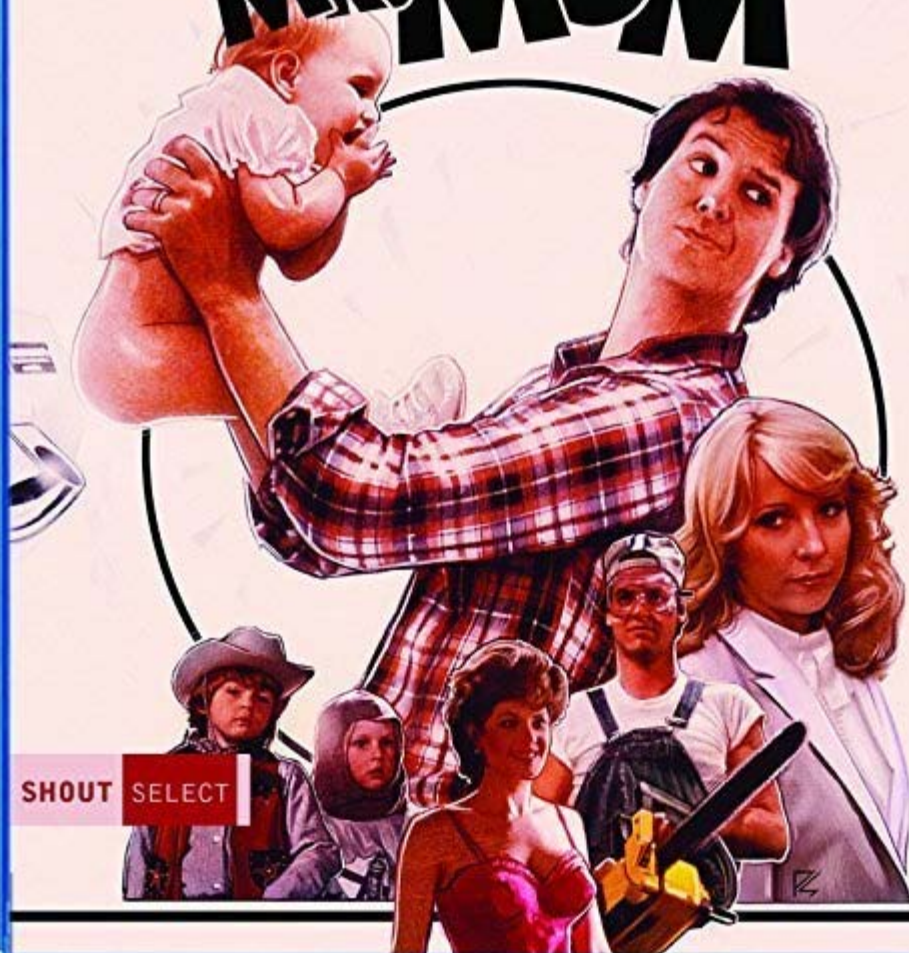


COLLECTOR'S EDITION

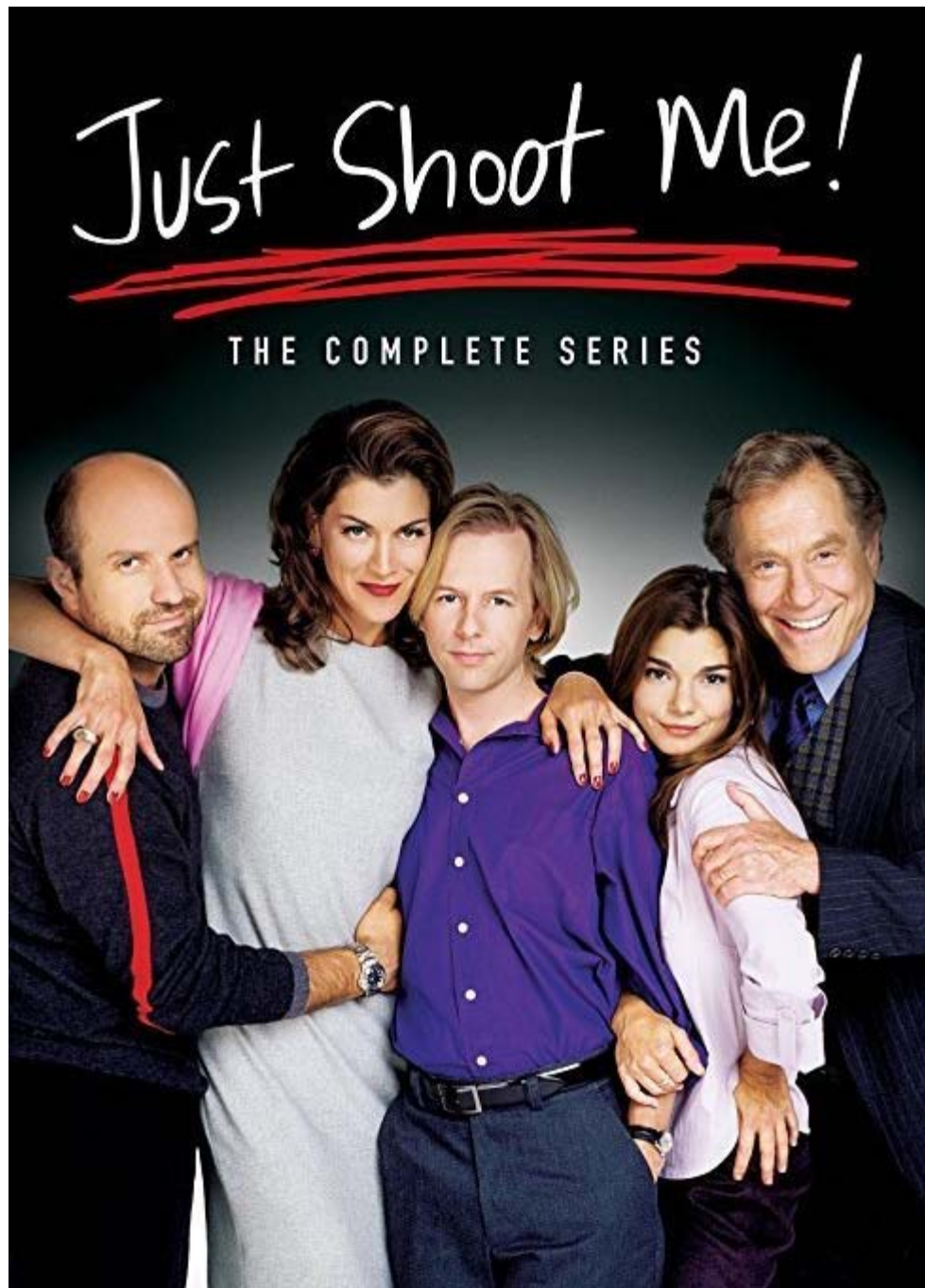
MICHAEL KEATON

TERI GARR

MR. MOM



SHOUT SELECT



BAYWATCH (\$29.99 BluRay; Paramount)

MR MOM (\$27.99 BluRay; Shout! Factory)

JUST SHOOT ME THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$79.97 DVD; Shout! Factory)

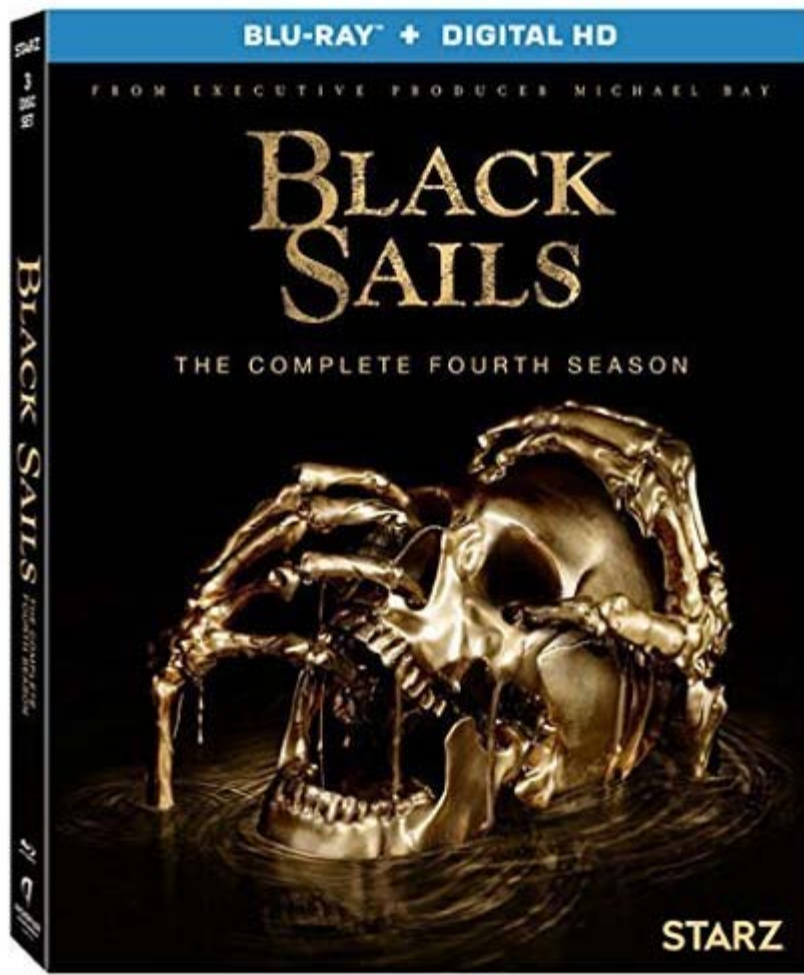
Well, what did you expect? Baywatch is a dumb comedy based on a dumb tv show. True, you can't satirize or mock a TV series that never took itself remotely seriously in the first place. But Baywatch doesn't act as if it's skewering the high and mighty — Dwayne Johnson and Zac Efron are just having a little fun. Why people reacted as if this were the worst idea ever just puzzles. And those who take a chance on a rental or stream or just purchase it outright will have their expectations properly lowered and thus pleasantly surprised.

Mr. Mom wasn't based on a TV show but it sure felt like it. Michael Keaton made the most of his fast-talking nutter in *Night Shift* but his amiable likability anchored this fluffy nothing about a guy who — horrors — had to stay home and take care of the kids while his wife went to work. It proved such a big hit that Universal gave the screenwriter John Hughes an impressive \$30 million, three picture deal. And whoever made that deal deserved a raise since Hughes went on to deliver *The Breakfast Club*, *Sixteen Candles* and *Weird Science*. But they should all send birthday cards and holiday gift baskets to Teri Garr, who quietly delivered in film after film, no matter how flimsy the material. The only surprise here is that they didn't turn this into a sitcom.

Is it possible to like a TV show when you don't like the star? Not really, but David Spade isn't really the star of the sitcom *Just Shoot Me!* He's just the annoying sauce ladled on top of a typical workplace comedy about life at a fashion magazine. Happily, everyone else around him is a pro, from Laura San Giacomo to George Segal to Wendie Malick on down. Seven seasons and 148 episodes for this is a little mind-blowing, but not when you remember this is a classic example of a time slot hit. It faltered out of the gate but NBC saw something and gave it a plum slot behind *Frasier* that gave it the highest ranking of its entire run, hitting #12. But it couldn't stand alone. The show dropped when it tried to kick off 9 pm on Tuesdays and did even worse when it anchored the entire Tuesday lineup at 8 pm. Luckily, NBC took pity and put it behind *Will & Grace* on Thursday, another plum slot that kept the show in the top 20 for seasons five and six. The final, almost dismissive season saw it bounce around four different timeslots and end up ranked outside the top 100 shows on TV! So even if you're a fan, chances are you haven't seen a good half of the episodes on tap in this inexpensive, compact boxed set.







THE WALKING DEAD COMPLETE SEVENTH SEASON (\$79.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

ASH VS EVIL DEAD SEASON 2 (\$43.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

BLACK SAILS COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON (\$43.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

TV isn't all about superheroes, despite the opening barrage of shows covered in this column. You've also got zombies and monsters and pirates!

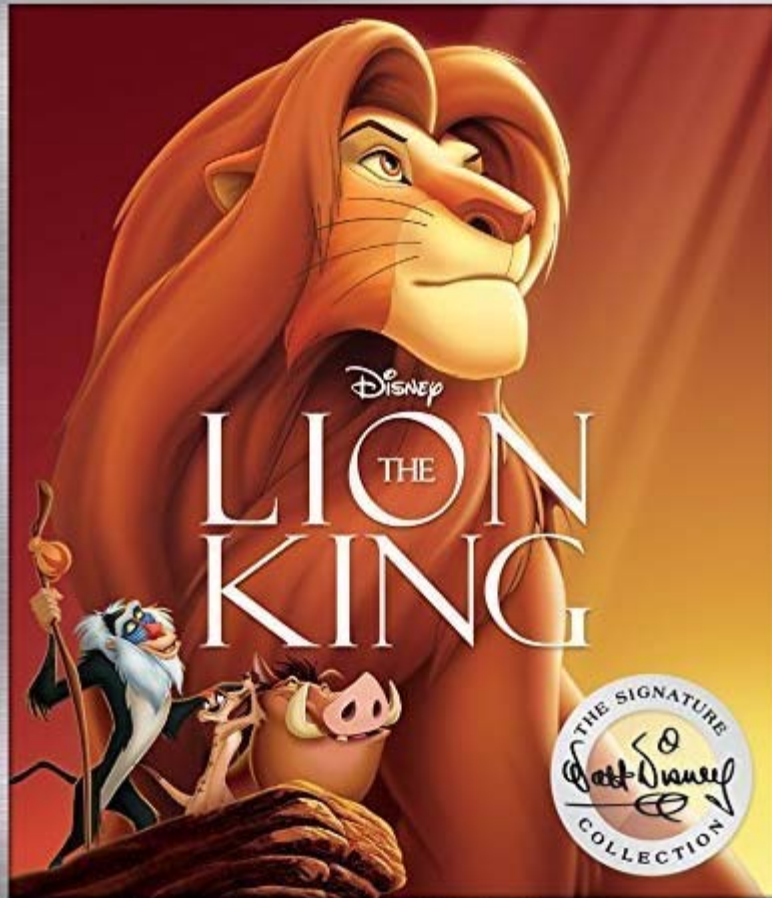
The Walking Dead is still going...well, not as strong creatively or commercially as it once was, but certainly strong enough. Even fans of this pretty darn violent show thought it got a little grim there for a while. And not just the decapitations — the real grimness on tap is the realization that surviving may mean giving up your humanity. What are you willing to do to survive and is it worth it? Our gang of hopefuls is thoroughly crushed by a new group called The Savivors and the entire season becomes a brutal fight to hold on to their decency (or at least loyalty to one another) and then team up with others. Can they crush brutality with brutality? Do they need to plan for a finale? Well, the show is about to hit 100 episodes when the new season begins October 22 and they've only burned through 114 issues of the comic book. So at this rate they've still got a good three or four seasons left. And there's no worry about going all *Game Of Thrones* since the comic book

is still going strong.

Ash Vs. Evil Dead on the other hand is a gruesome lark, a la *Re-animator*. All hail Bruce Campbell, who anchors this lunacy with square-jawed determination. It's a lot funnier when the characters take themselves seriously and Campbell has been doing that for more than 35 years. Almost as much fun is Lee Majors as his dad and Lucy Lawless as an immortal on a quest. If you dig *Evil Dead*, you're surely already watching. If you think *The Walking Dead* needs more laughs, this one's for you.

And pirates! By default, *Black Sails* is the greatest pirate series in the history of TV. Has there ever been another one? This was the fourth and final season of the series and I'm looking forward to watching this one from the start. Our hero is Toby Stephen as James McGraw. Rather remarkably, the series knows from the start that the disgraced McGraw has a secret grudge against England but we don't. It's only in the second season that we realize this ruthless leader of pirates lost his life of privilege for the love of a man. And *Black Pirates* doesn't even wuss out with making McGraw bisexual either. As a bonus, we also get female queer characters who are major players in the story as well. Indeed, the entire series has pivoted on what these people sacrifice when choosing to fight for power. They clearly intended this from the start — the entire series pivots on this backstory. But they didn't tease it from the start nor did they cheapen it by making the big reveal and then letting our hero suffer silently in chaste martyrdom. It's kind of jaw-dropping and makes the recent *Spartacus* seem tame in comparison. As a bonus, knowing the show would end in its fourth season allowed the creators to end the storyline with class. Very binge-worthy.

BLU-RAY™ + DVD + DIGITAL



THE CIRCLE OF LIFE EDITION

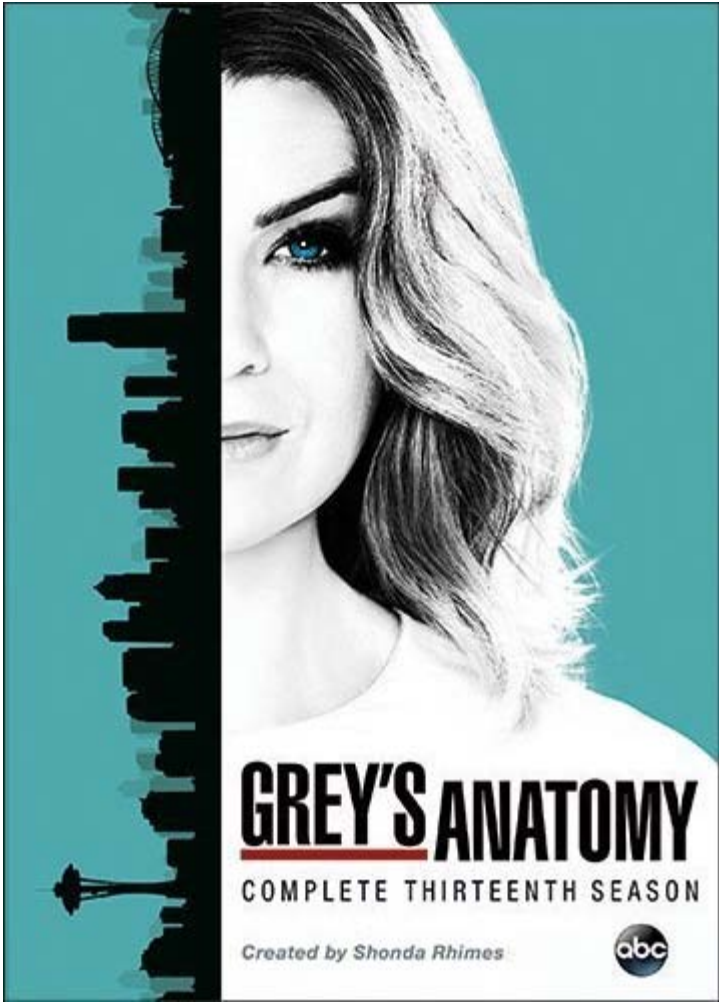


THE LION KING SIGNATURE COLLECTION (\$39.99 BluRay; Walt Disney)

STAR WARS REBELS COMPLETE SEASON THREE (\$45.99 BluRay; Buena Vista Home Entertainment)

To be honest, I haven't been a fan of the fitfully successful movie *The Lion King* from day one. But the passage of time has not been kind to the score (whose sole moment of greatness is "Circle of Life") or the story. But no expense was spared and it looks darn good, no doubt about it. I'll take *The Little Mermaid* and *Aladdin* and numerous other mid-period Disney films over this one any day of the week. And the first 15 minutes of the stage adaptation is one of the great thrills of the theater. (I do love my puppets.) But my personal taste aside, it's a landmark film and Disney treats even its minor films with great care so you know this looks amazing and has the extras to justify the premium price.

While *The Lion King* has been lauded since day one, *Star Wars Rebels* has suffered the fate of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, another animated series. It had an initial burst of attention but then quickly settled back into being purely for diehard fans. That's a shame since just like the trailers for the feature films, the TV shows inspired by *Star Wars* have proven far better than most movies at doing a better job than George Lucas at maintaining the spirit of the first two films. Despite being nominally geared to kids, it doesn't minimize the stakes of life and death. Add in a cool visual style, good voice work and the fact that the fourth and final season means this show could build to a really satisfying conclusion and anyone eagerly awaiting the next *Star Wars* film this December just discovered a great way to prepare.





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YOU ARE MADE OF

THE IMMORTAL LIFE OF HENRIETTA LACKS

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THE WHITE PRINCESS

A STARZ ORIGINAL LIMITED SERIES

THE
WHITE PRINCESS

~ 50 min

PG-13



STARZ



GREY'S ANATOMY COMPLETE THIRTEENTH SEASON (\$45.99 DVD; ABC Studios)

THE IMMORTAL LIFE OF HENRIETTA LACKS (\$24.98 BluRay; HBO)

THE WHITE PRINCESS (\$39.39 BluRay; Lionsgate)

ENDEAVOUR COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON (\$49.99 BluRay; PBS)

Clearly, *Grey's Anatomy* is going to at least match *E.R.* as the longest-running medical drama in TV history, come season 15. They're at season thirteen and going strong (thank you, streaming!) with some characters present from day one, others dying off, others popping in and out and newbies who are eager to strut their stuff but need to be humbled but fast always on tap. It's a soap opera that manages the tricky task of balancing ongoing background stories for the main cast with weekly mini-dramas involving the patients. That ain't easy and *Grey's* has it down pat. It's been a long time since the show was anything more than a guilty pleasure...well, actually it was never more than a guilty pleasure, just a very well acted one. I still miss T.R. Knight's endearing O'Malley....

I thought the nonfiction bestseller *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* was an unlikely property for turning into a film. I mean, it's the story of how a woman's cervical cancer cells were used without her permission for scientific study, raising issues of class and race and medical ethics while illuminating some really intriguing breakthroughs. It was certainly fascinating, but a film? Well, toss in Oprah Winfrey and HBO and you've got...a pretty un-engaging movie that didn't quite figure out how to dramatize a story that works much better on the page than it ever would on the screen.

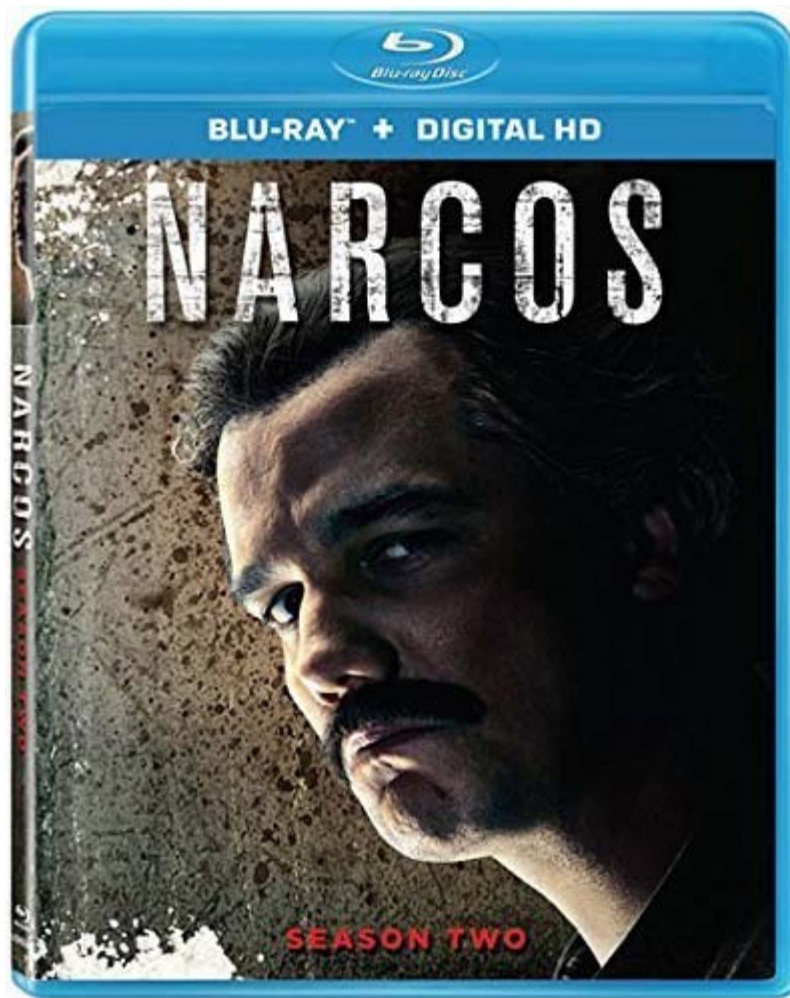
When is a TV show a TV show and not a miniseries or an anthology? Does anyone really care but the Emmy Award people who have to figure this stuff out? No, not really. What's really interesting about *The White Princess* — a limited series on Starz — is that it exists at all. That channel and the BBC previously partnered on the drama *The White Queen*, based on the novel by the prolific and talented historical novelist Philippa Gregory. When that show failed to catch fire in the UK, the BBC said a bruited sequel wouldn't happen. Not so fast, said Starz which did just fine with the original and wanted more. So here comes the standalone miniseries *The White Princess*, with Henry VII and Elizabeth of York marrying to end the War of the Roses. Of course, that's where the struggle for political power begins. Only ardent Anglophiles need apply.

Mind you, genuine Anglophiles — especially those with a taste for murder — will be too busy watching the latest season of *Endeavour*, the prequel series to *Inspector Morse* (and *Inspector Lewis*, come to think of it). Season four treads water a bit. The mysteries have never been the strong suit of this show and they avoid moving the personal lives of the characters forward more than a tad at the end of these four TV movie length episodes. The saving grace are the actors, led by Shaun Evans and Roger Allam. And yes, there will be a season five in 2018.



KINJI FUKASAKU'S
NEW BATTLES WITHOUT
HONOR AND
HUMANITY
THE COMPLETE TRILOGY





NEW BATTLES WITHOUT HONOR AND HUMANITY COMPLETE TRILOGY (\$79.98 BluRay; Arrow Video)

NARCOS SEASON TWO (\$29.97 BluRay; Lionsgate)

Nothing should be burdened with comparisons to greatness. No singer-songwriter should be called the next Dylan, not even Bruce Springsteen. So while it's inevitable the early 1970s Japanese gangster flicks *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* would be compared to *The Godfather*, it's better just to enjoy those five films on their own terms. While Francis Ford Coppola was very, very wrong to give into temptation and make *The Godfather Part III*, the sort of remake that kicks off the modern trilogy dubbed *New Battles Without Honor and Humanity* aren't nearly the fall from grace that Coppola suffered. If you haven't seen the originals, you'll probably find these just fine. If you have, you may wonder why you're not just watching those earlier flicks instead. In either case, they're presented with lavish care in this boxed set.

It's a lot easier to recommend season two of *Narcos*. This drama about Pablo Escobar came to its senses and said, hey, this vicious and evil drug lord is our main protagonist and we're gonna stop apologizing for it. Wagner Moura dug into his role with subtle brilliance and made this villain TV's most compelling anti-hero since oh, Walter White or Tony Soprano or take your pick. If it keeps getting better, they should start planning a five season and out game plan.



THE
Frank Sinatra
COLLECTION
THE ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL (1962)

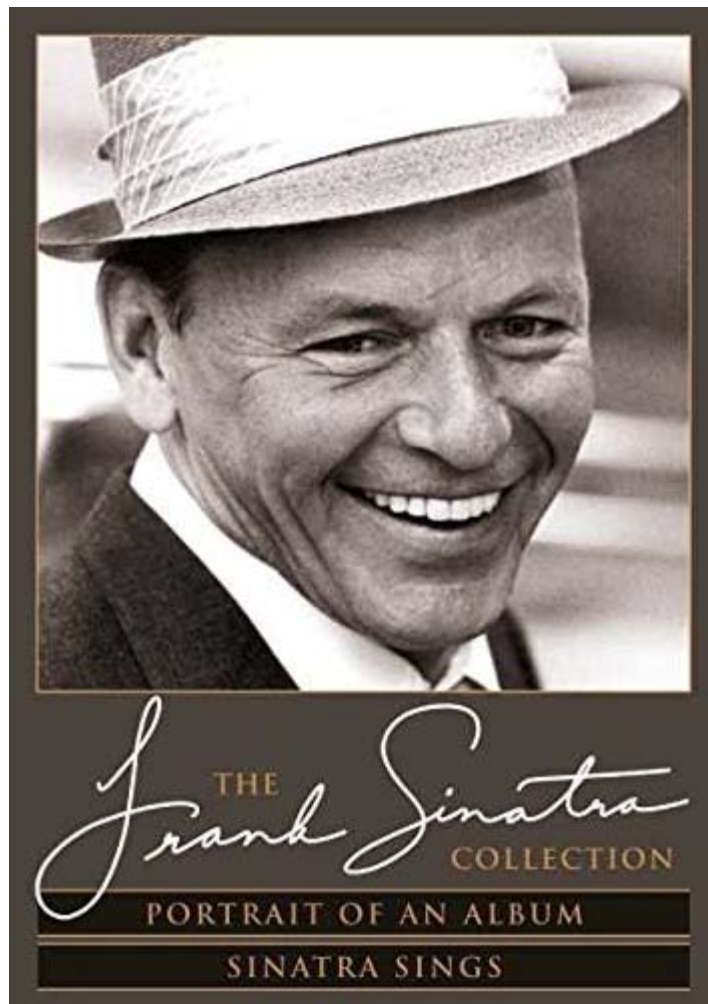
LIVE AT CARNEGIE HALL



THE
Frank Sinatra
COLLECTION

LIVE FROM CAESARS PALACE

THE FIRST 40 YEARS



FRANK SINATRA: THE ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL/LIVE AT CARNEGIE HALL (\$9.98 DVD; Eagle Vision)

FRANK SINATRA: LIVE FROM CAESARS PALACE/THE FIRST 40 YEARS (\$9.98 DVD; Eagle Vision)

FRANK SINATRA: PORTRAIT OF AN ALBUM/SINATRA SINGS (\$9.98 DVD; Eagle Vision)

Ol' Blue Eyes and his estate have been releasing some pleasantly modest DVDs of his voluminous TV archives. One might have hoped for a remastered boxed set that would daunt all but ardent fans like myself with its price. Instead, we've enjoyed a steady stream of releases, capped by these final three. None will wow you with visuals or sound but they're all acceptable. By far the best of this batch is The Royal Festival Hall/Live At Carnegie Hall, with two full concerts on top. The first from 1962 finds Sinatra in ring-a-ding form in London while the second finds him backed by a full orchestra and enjoying his last great peak moment of fame thanks to the bloated but sometimes brilliant album Trilogy capped by a hit that would prove yet another signature hit for the singer who had been delivering them for more than 40 years. That hit was of course "New York, New York," the song he stole from pal Liza Minnelli. Less interesting is the second DVD with Sinatra at Caesar's Palace, a Vegas set which meant Sinatra might be in peak form (such as his classic live album with Count Basie) or treating it like a goof. That's backed by a tribute special, always a mixed bag. The final DVD is the least interesting of all, with a documentary puff piece about the making of a forgettable album called L.A.

Is My Lady with the great Quincy Jones. More interesting is a compilation of TV clips narrated by Nancy Sinatra that has a lot of little seen clips. That's one solid DVD and two more that have tantalizing bits. Happily, all three combined can be had quite inexpensively so you don't really have to choose.

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