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FEATURES

IGN FilmForce Weekend Shopping Guide 1/14/05: Channel Surfing

Neil Innes, Beatles, Fraggles, The French Revolution, and more...

January 14, 2005 - A bit of a TV alert first off – for all you history buffs out there (like me) – be sure and catch the excellent documentary on *The French Revolution* that airs this Monday, January 17th at 9pm/8c on The History Channel. I'm really digging these docs (their enlightening look at Ben Franklin from a few months back was a hoot).

I've heard many an artist/group try to ape the soaring harmonies and stunning melodies of Brian Wilson and [The Beach Boys](#), but there are very few who succeed – either because they don't have the songwriting talent or there's a deficiency in the vocal area, or there's simply an inability to replicate the often complicated production (all of which goes hand-in-hand in creating that legendary sound). With his debut album, *Channel Surfing* (Boyd Production Group, \$10 + \$1 shipping), Alan Boyd has managed to capture every aspect in a seemingly effortless manner, allowing the beautiful – and devilishly catchy – original tunes to really shine through. Boyd, an award-winning documentarian by day, claims that this CD is a collection of home demos and recordings, but I think he's lying – he's gotta be, because they are mind-blowingly polished. If this is what he's capable of with a home setup, I can only imagine what he'd unleash given a full studio setup. Even closer to my heart, he's a big fan of Harry Nilsson – another artist gifted with a unique harmonic ability and a true songwriting genius – and Boyd's tribute track to him, "The Earthquake," is an evocative homage. You can order *Channel Surfing* directly via Boyd's website, www.boydproductiongroup.com, and I can't encourage you enough to do so. I can't wait to hear his follow-up – whatever it is.



Special Effects: An Oral History (Abrams, \$37.50 SRP) is one of those books that film fans dream of – you know, the kind that's filled with all of the obscure methodology and trivia about the magic of moviemaking. Covering everything from stop motion and forced perspective to latex and CGI, and illustrated with thousands of photos, the craft, science, and alchemy of special effects is told by the magicians themselves, in little vignettes covering scores of films. I love it!



Though I thought their *Yellow Submarine* toys were great, I think McFarlane Toys has hit all my buttons with their figures based on [The Beatles](#) mid-60's Saturday morning cartoon show produced by King Features (McFarlane Toys, \$11.99 SRP each). The Fab Four come dressed in their early-era matching attire (which they wore in virtually every episode of the cartoon), and the likenesses are perfect – these could pass as maquettes for the series. Each figure comes with a stage piece that can be assembled into a pretty snazzy display, with Ringo getting the most accessories – his drum kit – while the remaining Fabs each come with their non-removable guitars. This really is meant as a display piece, and when it's done this well, I'm perfectly



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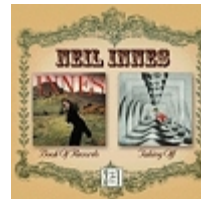
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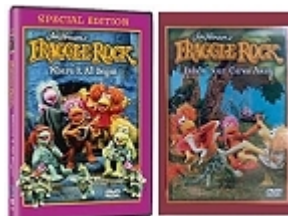
fine with that.



I've spoken often of the genius of Neil Innes in the past, and it's still a crime that none of his catalogue beyond the *Rutles* albums are available stateside, but there have been a few quiet releases in the UK of some of those previously unavailable albums, mastered directly from vinyl sources due to the major kerfuffle that is Innes's back catalogue. This week, I'm recommending you snatch the 2-albums-on-1-CD release of *Taking Off/Innes Book of Records* (Hux Records, £11.99). Originally released in 1977 and 1979, respectively, they've long been out of print, which is a damn shame. Still, releases like this rectify the situation somewhat until a company here in the US (Come on, Shout! Factory) makes the right decision, picks him up, and gives Innes the attention he deserves.



I thought I would never see the day that the Henson Company would get their heads out of their... Umm... and get *Fraggle Rock* onto DVD (especially after their bone-headed sale of the Muppets – sans *FR* and their fantasy properties – to Disney). Long out-of-print on VHS and no longer on television (there was a brief run on the Hallmark Channel when Henson was a co-owner), episodes have finally hit with a pair of episode collections, each featuring 3 episodes and a few bonus materials.



Fraggle Rock: Where It All Began (HIT Entertainment, Not Rated, DVD-\$16.99 SRP) features the first three episodes ("Beginnings," "Wembley and the Gorgs," and "Let the Water Run"), plus the "Musical History of Fraggle Rock" featurette and a pair of episodes from the far inferior animated series. The second release is *Dance Your Cares Away* (HIT Entertainment, Not rated, DVD-\$16.99 SRP) features another trio of eps ("Boober Gorg," "Blanket of Snow, Blanket of Woe," and "Inspector Red"), with bonus features including a featurette on Doc & Sprocket, another animated episode, plus a bonus surprise (hint – finish the trivia quiz). Season sets are supposed to be on the way before the end of the year. Personally, I can't wait, and all I have to say is , "It's about time!" Oh, and DON'T SKIMP ON THE BONUS MATERIALS!

Sometimes it's good to be the King, but since I lack the talent of the legendary Jack Kirby, I'll just have to admire all of the breathtaking artwork in the remastered *Kirby Unleashed* portfolio (Twomorrows, \$24.00), originally

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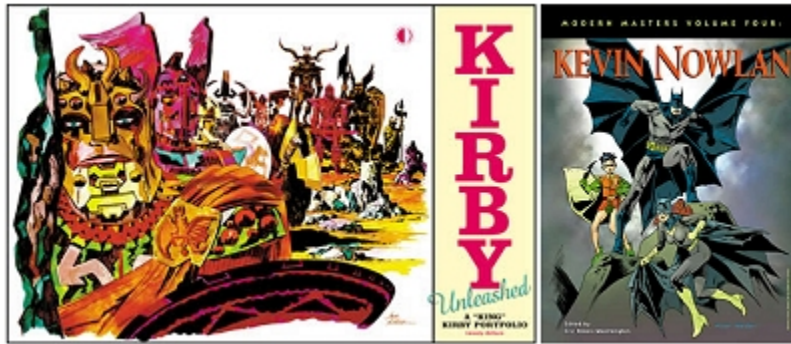
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produced in 1971 and containing some of the most stunning Kirby pieces you've ever laid eyes on (including additional art not available in the original edition). There's a reason he was called "The King." Also available from Twomorrows is the latest in their *Modern Masters* artist series, this time featuring Kevin Nowlan (Twomorrows, \$14.95 SRP). Pick that up along with the previous volumes, featuring artists Bruce Timm, Alan Davis, and George Perez. So where's John Byrne?



I've praised the beautiful work that [Spacecraft Films](#) has been doing when it comes to preserving and presenting – mission by mission – the historical, and largely unseen, material from the NASA archives. Their latest release focuses on the last prep mission before Apollo 11 made its landmark journey to the moon. The 2-disc *Apollo 10: The Dress Rehearsal* (Spacecraft Films, Not Rated, DVD-\$34.99 SRP) features the complete in-flight TV transmissions, the complete onboard film, multi-angle launch footage, crew prep footage, and rare pre- and post-flight commentary from the crew and NASA officials.



There's something wonderfully off-kilter about *Danny Deckchair*, (Lions Gate, Rated PG-13, DVD-\$26.95 SRP) – one of those small little foreign films that just manages to ooze affability from every one of its low-budget pores. Rhys Ifans plays the man whom the media have dubbed "Danny Deckchair" – a schlub so fed up with his common existence that he straps a load of balloons to a deckchair and floats away, eventually landing in a remote town and starting a new life with a new love (*LOTR's* Miranda Otto). The only problem is that he's become a bit of a cult figure, and everyone – particularly the media – is desperate to find him. Like I said – it's small, it's quirky, and it's fun. The DVD features an audio commentary with Ifans and director Jeff Balsmeyer, a making-of featurette, and the theatrical trailer.



As if *Tanner '88* weren't enough, Criterion has released a deluxe, 2-disc special edition of what is arguably one of director Robert Altman's finest films, the Raymond Carver inspired *Short Cuts* (Criterion, Not Rated, DVD-\$39.95 SRP). Altman has often been hit-and-miss as a filmmaker, but he manages to bring his sprawling cast of luminaries together into a cohesive series of vignettes based on Carver's short stories. In addition to a fully restored and remastered print, bonus materials include an isolated music track, a new videotaped conversation between Altman and Tim Robbins, the *Luck, Trust and Ketchup: Robert Altman in Carver Country* feature-length documentary on the making of the film, a PBS documentary on Carver, a segment from BBC's *Moving Pictures* on the development of the screenplay, a 1983 audio with Carver, original demo recordings of the Dr. John tracks featured in the film, deleted



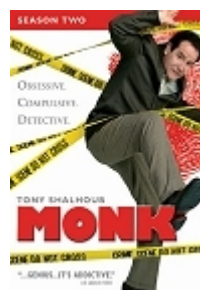
scenes, and a featurette on the marketing of the film. The set also features a small book collection some of Carver's stories featured in the film, with an introduction from Altman.

Packed within a massive tome adorned by the famous logo, *Twentieth Century Fox: Inside the Photo Archive* (Abrams, \$50.00) is certainly a volume that lives up to its deceptively simple title – it's packed with hundreds of rare studio publicity photos spanning the studio's entire history, many of which are surprisingly candid. A perfect coffee table book and a slice of film history all in one (and with a foreword by Martin Scorsese to boot).

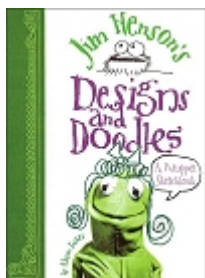


Of course, you could always pick up the second volume of *MI-5* (BBC, Not Rated, DVD-\$79.98 SRP), the celebrated BBC actioner about the secretive British intelligence service (think *24* without the time gimmick). The 5-disc set contains cast & crew interviews, deleted scenes, featurettes, and audio commentaries.

Although the series stumbled in its third (and most recent) season, the quirky dramedy *Monk* was still going strong in its sophomore year (Universal, Not Rated, DVD-\$59.95 SRP). The real strength of the show remains Tony Shalhoub's brilliant rendering of the obsessive-compulsive detective, whose problems prevent him from returning to the police force – but not from solving crimes with his assistant Sharona. The 4-disc Season Two set features character profiles of Disher and Stottlemeyer, "The Minds Behind Monk" featurette, and precinct tours.



There have been many iterations prior to this, but I think we've finally got a definitive version of Luc Besson's *Leon (The Professional)* (Columbia/Tristar, Not Rated, DVD-\$24.95 SRP) with the release of the 2-disk deluxe edition. The first disc features the Superbit version of the film, with the bonus features on disc 2. Those bonus features are a 10 Year Retrospective, "Jean Reno: The Road to Leon" featurette, and "Natalie Portman: Starting Young" featurette.



There's no bigger Muppet fan than me (unless we're talking metric), and I always love exploring the genesis of Jim Henson's creations and the extent of his creativity. Now available in paperback, *Jim Henson's Designs and Doodles* (Abrams, \$19.95 SRP) is a great place for the both fans and the curious to start, as it features – like the title suggests – many of the sketches that became the basis for some of the most iconic characters of the 20th century.

There's something about being waylaid by sickness (of which I'm on the mend, thank you) that makes me want to watch documentaries. I don't know why, really. Maybe it's because, unlike my usual multitasking approach to watching anything, I can really concentrate on the pieces at hand. Coming of the recent election season, I popped in *Last Man Standing: Politics, Texas Style* (Docurama, Not Rated, DVD-\$26.95 SRP), which is a candid – and surpassingly funny – look at the brutal nature of Lone Star politicking by focusing on a pair of state elections, including that of governor. Heading out East, *Taking on the Kennedys*



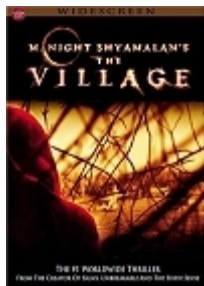
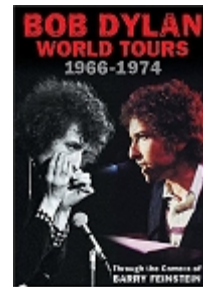
(Docurama, Not Rated, DVD-\$26.95 SRP) is an equally candid look at the U.S. House campaign of idealistic Rhode Island doctor Kevin Vigilante, who had the misfortune of taking on the down-and-dirty Kennedy campaign machine in the form of rival candidate Patrick Kennedy. Finally, I was fascinated to learn a slice of history I had no idea about in *Shanghai Ghetto* (Docurama, Not Rated, DVD-\$39.95 SRP). It seems, at the height of the Nazi aggression against the Jews, numerous countries essentially closed their borders to the refugees. With no place to go, a door finally was opened – by Japanese-controlled Shanghai. Penniless and unprepared for what lie before them, these thousands of persecuted Europeans formed a settlement. History is endlessly fascinating, isn't it?

Anyone who's been to one of Disney's big Broadway spectacles over the years (*Beauty and the Beast*, *Lion King*) will probably get a kick out of *A Day at the New Amsterdam Theatre* (Disney Editions, \$24.95), which takes readers on a photo-filled tour behind-the-scenes at the workings of the historic theater Disney refurbished in the early 90's to house their successful revitalization of The Great White Way.



As romantic comedies go, *Little Black Book* (Columbia/Tristar, Rated PG-13, DVD-\$26.95 SRP) is like a puff pastry – light, fluffy, and not terribly good for you in large doses. Brittany Murphy stars as a nice girl who's seduced by the Dark Side when she decides to pursue one of the themes of the *Sally Jessy*-esque talkshow she works for by examining the secret contents of her boyfriend's Palm Pilot. Can you say madcap, revelatory Pandora's Box time? The DVD features a making-of and a featurette on the inner workings of daytime talk shows.

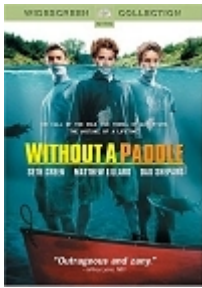
Bob Dylan: World Tours 1966-1974 (MVD, Not Rated, DVD-\$14.95 SRP) is a documentary that explores the stories behind photographer Barry Feinstein's legendary Dylan tour photos, using interviews and new footage of such mythic locations as Big Pink. It certainly makes for a nice companion piece to Dylan's recent autobiography release.



With *The Village* (Touchstone, Rated PG-13, DVD-\$29.99 SRP), I hope audiences have finally realized, digested, and fully comprehended what a one trick pony hack writer/director/ego M. Night Shyamalan is. Not only has his insufferable reliance on a "twist" gimmick finally reached its inevitably pathetic nadir, but the story – about an isolated village full of idiots, a blind girl, and something "spooky" lurking in the woods – is complete crap as well. As far as bonus features go, you've got deleted scenes with "explanations" from Night, a home movie, a diary from Bryce Howard, a behind-the-scenes featurette, and a photo gallery. Oh, and for further insight into the pathetic insanity of M. Night, there's the mockumentary *The Buried Secret of M. Night Shyamalan* (Touchstone, Not Rated, DVD-\$29.99 SRP) that originally aired to critical drubbing on the Sci-Fi Channel. Who's unbreakable now, Night?

Last week I praised Fantagraphics' collections of George Herriman's seminal comic strip *Krazy Kat*, and *Krazy Kat: The Comic Art of George Herriman* (Abrams, \$19.95 SRP) is the perfect companion volume, featuring a ton of artwork and strips.

It's not genius by any stretch of the imagination, but there's a dumb affability



to *Without a Paddle* (Paramount, Rated PG-13, DVD-\$29.95 SRP), owing mostly to its trio of treasure-seeking stars – Seth Green, Matthew Lillard, and Dax Shepard. The story – about the trio's deep south hunt for the money stolen by the legendary missing hijacker D.B. Cooper – is mostly inconsequential, as it's really just a string of comic set pieces... And I'm fine with that. Sometimes you need mental floss. The DVD features an audio



commentary with director Steven Brill, a video commentary with the cast and Brill, MTV's making-of special, deleted scenes with optional commentary, MTV interstitials, and the theatrical trailer.

The Young Visitors or Mr. Salteena's Plan (BBC, Not Rated, DVD-\$19.95 SRP) was written in 1890 by 9-year-old Daisy Ashford. As such, its tale of "an elderly man of 42" (Jim Broadbent) is full of completely naïve – yet utterly insightful in their naivete – representations of the importance of class, sex, and society in the Victorian era. Filled with grammatical mistakes, it's quite a beautiful, and funny, piece.



If anyone was wondering what Howard Shore would segue into post-Hobbits & Wizards, look no further than the score to Martin Scorsese's Howard Hughes biopic, *The Aviator* (Decca, \$18.98 SRP). Is it a

worthy follow-up from a composer that is fast becoming a favorite of mine? Yes indeed-y. While we're talking soundtracks, another pair worth checking out are Bruno Coulais' score to *The Chorus* (Nonesuch, \$18.98 SRP) and Angelo Badalamenti's score to Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *A Very Long Engagement* (Nonesuch, \$18.98 SRP).

Although *This Girl's Life* (Hart Sharp, Not Rated, DVD-\$24.99 SRP) is supposed to focus on the world of a young Internet porn star, Moon (played without caricature by Juliette Marquis), the film is stolen by James Woods as Moon's ailing father. Surprisingly similar to the sexual liberation expressed during the heyday of the 60's [foreign film](#) movement (I kid you not), it manages an effective updating of the same universal themes. The DVD features interviews with Marquis and costar Rosario Dawson.



During my elementary school years, I remember February as being Black History Month. I can't remember when Library appreciation month was, or half the holidays, but I can remember celebrating Black History Month quite clearly. One of the films I remember being shown (can't remember the year) was *The Autobiography of*

Miss Jane Pittman (Classic Media, Not Rated, DVD-\$16.95 SRP), in which Cicely Tyson played the titular character – a 110-year-old former slave who lives to see, and participate in – the Civil Rights movement. The story is a powerful one, but the centerpiece is Tyson's amazing transformation as she portrays Pittman down through the years. The new 2-disc 30th anniversary edition features a trio of new documentaries and Emmy clips. Also worth picking up, while we're on the subject of Black History, are a pair of titles – [Ken Burns's](#) *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (PBS, Not Rated, DVD-\$24.99 SRP), which tells the story of the first African American to become Heavyweight Champion of the World, and *The Story of Gospel Music*

(BBC, Not Rated, DVD-\$19.98 SRP), whose title is pretty self-explanatory.

I'm going to close out this week's column with another fine figure from the folks at McFarlane Toys, and it's easily the stand-out from their latest wave (Series 7!) of *Movie Maniacs* figures – the one, the only Robocop (McFarlane Toys, \$9.99 SRP). Thankfully based on the original Verhoeven feature, it's sure to get a place of honor on your already crowded geek shelf.



So there you have it... my humble suggestions for what to watch, listen to, play with, or waste money on this coming weekend. Be sure to check back next week for a whole new list of cash-sapping trinkets too cool to ignore...

– Ken P. is feeling a whole lot better, thank you...

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