

AV/DVDs

Ray biography shines on DVD

Ray, the film biography of singer Ray Charles, is a flawed yet commanding, even exhilarating film.

It is no accident that filmmaker Taylor Hackford's effort is both a best picture candidate and a vehicle for Jamie Foxx to win the best actor Oscar. Foxx is bottled lightning. And the sublime energy he generates is not just the flash seen in the musical numbers on stage, although that is impressive enough. It is even more the spark of light and life he puts into the portrayal of a complete human being.

The actor channels what Hackford calls "the thorny ethos of Ray Charles," a reference to Charles' heroin addiction, sexual escapades and his occasional brutish business practices (although no worse than many in the music biz).

So I was thrilled to find *Ray* arrive on DVD, the first of the best picture contenders to debut. The two-disc set is out now in separate wide and fullscreen editions.

Unfortunately, the DVD is also flawed. Because I had not seen it in theatres and wanted something fresh to talk about, I made the choice of viewing it first in the so-called Extended Version. Bad move. Unlike Peter Jackson's seamless efforts when he extended the three segments of *The Lord of the Rings*, Hackford drops 25 minutes of footage in with no finesse. New scenes are hand grenades, pins pulled.

Music notes suddenly appear on screen, the image freezes, and then the new scene explodes. In most cases, the colour and sound are different and the transitions clunky. Another freeze, another pop, and you're back watching the smoother theatrical version. The process is distracting and, if this amateur-looking effort had been shown in theatres, *Ray* would never have earned an Oscar nom for best editing.

If you want even more of what *Ray* has to offer, a *Limited Edition Gift Set* is being offered with all that the basic one has to offer along with seven more extended musical numbers, a longer documentary on the tortuous 15-year history of the film, plus other goodies such as a 28-page photo journal.



IN ANOTHER WORLD

Another Oscar contender new to DVD has none of the notoriety or glamour of *Ray*. Yet

it is also worth a long look and an open heart. The film is *The Story of the Weeping Camel*, co-directed by Byambasuren Davaa, a Mongolian,

and Luigi Falorni, an Italian. They became collaborators after attending film school together in Germany.

Their beautifully photographed documentary is set in the Gobi Desert of southern Mongolia.

Weeping Camel is nominated as best documentary feature. Using "staged" and scripted segments, it elegantly tells the story of a how a family of animal herders show concern for a threatened new-born camel calf. The strength of

the piece is that it does not treat the family as an ethno-freak show — as if this were cultural exotica — and instead emphasizes the universality of the human experience. That it can do so while showing the intricacies of life among people who follow ancient ways, and yet are fascinated by new technologies, is a delicate balancing act that is deftly maintained.

The DVD — released last Tuesday as Oscar nominations were announced — comes in a handsome widescreen transfer. But the extras are stingy, primarily a photo gallery. I would have loved to have met the



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filmmakers on disc and learned more about the Mongolian family.



I DON'T DANCE

At least, not to this music-filled movie. The Hollywood version of *Shall We Dance?* is a mediocre, if star-studded affair that

sucks the life of the unique concept for the 1996 Japanese original. Shot in L.A. and Winnipeg (after SARS scared Richard Gere, Jennifer Lopez and Susan Sarandon out of Toronto), *Shall We Dance?* is cheap melodrama with predictable twists.

The DVD, out in wide and fullscreen editions, has a decent lineup of extras, including director Peter Chelsom's commentary, deleted scenes and a making-of featurettes. Best of all is the *Beginners Ballroom* featurette which looks at the history of couples-dancing and the rigours of the ballroom circuit.

MUSIC DVD

I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART
A FILM ABOUT WILCO BY SAM JONES



Wilco

I Am Trying to Break Your Heart
Plexifilm / Sonic Unyon

No, you aren't having *deja vu*. This compelling B&W doc chronicling the difficult recording of Wilco's 2002 album *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* — and its even more tumultuous aftermath — came out back in 2003. But if you bought it then, you probably shelled out \$40 or more for the import version. This domestic reissue has everything in the original set — including the bonus disc with more than an hour of unreleased footage — but shouldn't cost you more than \$25. They may be out to break your heart, but at least they're sparing your wallet.

★★★★



Bob Dylan
World Tours 1966 - 1974
MVD

In this transfixingly bizarre documentary, a Dylan impersonator from L.A. travels to New York City, Woodstock and elsewhere to talk to a few of Bob's old cronies like photographer Barry Feinstein, filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker and drummer Mickey Jones. He sifts through a bunch of Feinstein's old tour snaps (hence the title), everybody reminisces and we hear a bunch of stuff we already knew about Bob. So what's the bizarre part? Well, that comes when the guy starts acting less like a devoted fan and more like an obsessed (if harmless) kook by skulking around Dylan's former homes, hanging out in Woodstock signing autographs with Bob's name, and — no fooling — recreating his 1966 motorcycle crash. Oh, and get this: He interviews that guy who used to steal Bob's garbage — and hassles him over his fixation with Dylan! Um, kettle? This is pot. You're black.

★★

— Darryl Sterdan