

Murders three

Abandoning the format and star of its unique first season, **Murder One** changed too much to maintain its momentum and only lasted eighteen episodes, which have been gathered in the 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment release, **Murder One The Complete Second Season** (UPC#0-24543190813, \$60). Originally broadcast in 1996 and 1997, Anthony LaPaglia replaces Daniel Benzali as the head of the prestigious Los Angeles law firm, and while he brings plenty of pep to the role (the show's dialog is always crisp and witty), he's a normal TV hero, where Benzali was one of a kind. Instead of following a single case from the beginning to the end of the season, there are three cases, with the first two overlapping just slightly and the final presented as a standalone multi-episode segment (fortunately, there was enough time before the show's cancellation to wrap everything up). Since the stories still run to multiple episodes, they remain more elaborate and better detailed than standard courtroom dramas (the voir dire fights become a regular part of each plot), but apparently the ability to pull off a complete, novel-length narrative that could span the full season, as was done in **First Season** (Apr 05), was beyond the capabilities of the show's creators. In any case, the first two stories are reasonably entertaining if somewhat fanciful, and the final tale is excellent. In the opening, a schoolteacher is accused of murdering the governor of California and his mistress, and in the story that follows, a basketball star is accused of shooting his team's owner. In the finale, the hero and his staff defend a vigilante who admits to having killed sixteen other criminals. For fans of courtroom dramas, the show is what you long for, but the promise of **First Season**—the creation of a season-long plot which has only recently been realized in shows such as **24** and **The Wire**—is not upheld, and some viewers may not be able to get past that letdown.

The full screen picture looks fine, with solid hues and accurate fleshtones. The opening theme music is dimensional, but little else is on the stereo surround soundtrack. There are alternate French and Spanish audio tracks, and optional English and Spanish subtitles. The episodes are spread to five platters and there is no 'Play All' option. A single-length episode runs 45 minutes, but there are a number of double-length episodes with one set of opening and closing credits, which run 88 minutes. A 20-minute retrospective documentary is also included, which features enjoyable interviews with many of the former cast members.

A quick Shower

Shot on video, **Shower of Blood**, a 2003 production available from Brain Damage Films (RD0232, \$15), is a cheaply but competently executed softcore vampire thriller. Five twenty-somethings visit a mansion in the woods that belongs to the uncle of one of them. After some elaborate teasing and a few nice hallucinations to eat up the brisk 80-minute running time, the uncle arrives and begins to feast. The acting is so-so, but the camera angles are well chosen, staying tight on the characters and sustaining the tension, and the program essentially delivers what it promises to viewers, a workable amount of gore and lots of topless nudity. The full screen picture is often a little grainy or overly dark, but never to the point of distraction. The stereo surround sound is reasonably loud, with a basic dimensionality. There is no captioning.

Pop cusp

A 1957 musical showcase attempting to straddle rock and schmaltz, **Jamboree** (UPC#085392752324, \$20), has been released by Warner Home Video. The 86-minute program has a standard loose narrative template, in which a young, romantically involved duet act splits to pursue separate careers (with a subplot in which their two older agents are also romantically entwined), but the story gets put on hold again and again as various musical groups perform complete numbers in recording studios, night clubs, Dick Clark broadcasts and so on. Jerry Lee Lewis, Fats Domino and Carl Perkins are featured, but so are Jodie Sands (singing an intriguing post-War ballad about reconciliation with Japan, *Please Don't Tell Me Sayonara*), Ron Coby, The Four Coins and other Fifties MOR forgettables. The film is a fascinating, inadvertent snapshot of a youth culture in transition, and although the plot can be said to serve as a metaphor for its musical dichotomy, it is doubtful that was even remotely a consideration on the part of the filmmakers.

The full screen black-and-white picture looks terrific, with crisp, finely detailed contrasts. The monophonic sound is solid (the vocals aren't always in synch, but that appears to be a flaw in the original production). There are optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, and a trailer.

Sinatra & Co.

It would be really great if some enterprising video company did for **The Frank Sinatra Show** what Geneon did for **The Judy Garland Show**, but for now, fans must be satisfied with the piecemeal release of individual episodes, such as the incredibly rich October 1958 59-minute broadcast, **The Frank Sinatra Show with Dean Martin and Bing Crosby High Hopes**, an MVD release (UPC#022891250395, \$15). The full screen black-and-white kinescope is speckled and soft looking, and the monophonic sound is also a little scratchy, but the talent and entertainment the program delivers is so overwhelming that such shortcomings hardly matter. Mitzi Gaynor joins the three men for some gender balance, and Jimmy Durante appears at the finale to push the show to a higher pinnacle of class, but throughout the program, the songs are delectable, the performances are delightful and the wit is

industrious. Even the Timex commercials are great fun. There is no captioning, but text profiles of the five stars are included.

How to start your own record label

A really nice documentary about a small Omaha record label that supported local garage bands in the Nineties and brought several to national prominence, **Spend an Evening with Saddle Creek**, is available from Plexifilm (UPC#08235400272, \$25). The 2005 feature, which runs 90 minutes, combines interviews with the band members and the label's operators, along with healthy clips of music from more than a dozen acts. It is a 'feel good' story, not about rising to fabulous fame and fortune, but about the satisfaction achieved by putting something together that does better than what is expected of it. Adding to those pleasures, the disc offers an additional 72 minutes of music and interview outtakes. The film itself is presented in letterboxed format with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The outtakes are letterboxed, but have no 16:9 enhancement. The film's color quality is workable but not meticulously lit or processed. The stereo sound is treated with better care and has a crisp delivery. There is no captioning. Among the bands featured are Azure Ray, Bright Eyes, The Faint, Lullaby for the Working Class, Polecat and Cursive.

Dylan remakes himself

The name of Bob Dylan's character in **Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid** was 'Alias' and he appeared in much of *Renaldo and Clara* wearing a mask. He has never wanted to be pinned down or categorized—he even writes songs about that—and there has always been speculation that his foray into gospel music in the Eighties wasn't based so much upon a religious conversion as upon a need to explore his creative talents while avoiding what was expected of him. The 82-minute 2005 documentary from Image Entertainment, **Gotta Serve Somebody: The Gospel Songs of Bob Dylan** (ID2894RBDVD, \$20), combines interviews, with the people who worked on Dylan's gospel albums, with performances of his songs by established gospel singers. There is also a performance clip of Dylan himself, and an animated music video accompanied by one of his recordings. The witnesses in the interviews believe that his spiritual conversion at the time was genuine, but if you look more deeply to find a motivation for the conversion itself, other factors could still be a strong part of it. In any case, the poetry and distinctive melodies he brought to the genre were well considered and have endured, as is evidenced by the performance sequences. Dottie Peoples, Aaron Neville, Helen Baylor, Rance Allen and the Chicago Mass Choir are among those featured. There is an option during the playback of the documentary that allows you to bring up the complete performance numbers (which are otherwise truncated by the interviews) at prompts, but the DVD also offers the eleven complete songs in a separate 'Play All' supplement that runs 56 minutes.

The tone of the full screen picture changes from one segment to the next, but it is in acceptable condition. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound delivers the songs with a full dimensionality and clear details. There is no captioning.

Highway 61 Entertainment has also released a documentary about that era in Dylan's career, **Bob Dylan 1975-1981 Rolling Thunder and The Gospel Years** (DR4484, \$15), but it is an 'unauthorized' effort and contains no Dylan music whatsoever. Directed by Dylan impersonator Bob Gilbert, whose on screen appearances can make it difficult at times to take the material seriously, the program runs a full 241 minutes (on one single-sided platter) and goes over Dylan's career from the indulgences of *Renaldo and Clara* through his apparent redemption in the gospel phase. There is an excellent interview with Ruben 'Hurricane' Carter—the documentary is long enough that you get Carter's complete story—and interviews with many of the people who worked with Dylan on and off the stage, culminating in a more thorough perspective upon his Christian conversion. An extensive history of his performances and recordings during those years is also woven into the tale. Hence, despite the somewhat tacky nature of Gilbert's presence as a guide through the program, fans will appreciate the show's scope and level of detail.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The image quality is okay and the stereo sound is adequate. There is no captioning. Additionally, there is an 11-minute look at Hibbing Minnesota, where Dylan spent some of his childhood, 13 minutes of outtakes from the interviews with musician Ramblin' Jack Elliot, a 12-minute montage of Dylan photos, and three cringe-inducing audio samples of Gilbert singing Dylan's music.

Grant collection

Romance is the primary focus of the sixteen music videos presented in the 65-minute compilation, **Amy Grant Greatest Videos 1986-2004**, an A&M Records release (UPC#602498640982, \$20). Ignoring the spiritual themes that got Grant's career started, the focus of the collection is on the satisfactions and longings of male-female relationships, as she advances in appearance from looking like a dewy-eyed college coed getting a handle on her emotions in numbers like *The Next Time I Fall* and *Stay for Awhile*, to a confident and worldly woman making her way through life in *House of Love* and *Takes a Little Time*, while her covers of *The Things We Do for Love* and *Big Yellow Taxi* bring a sense of playfulness to the collection.