

The fifth platter contains just the final episode of the season, along with 88 minutes of production featurettes. A couple of the featurettes that appeared on the **Miniseries** release have been moved to the fifth platter for **Season One** release. Taken as a whole, they provide a generalized but comprehensive look at how the series was put together. There is also a terrific 48 minutes of deleted scenes, including several with a pre-adolescent character that quite thankfully kind of disappeared from the show after the first couple of episodes. The scenes fill in story gaps, but also reveal plot turns that the filmmakers later decided to drop.

Veronica graduates

The sophomore season of **Veronica Mars** depicts the heroine's senior year in high school. **First Season** (Jan 06) was a delightful mix of teen problems and adult crimes as the heroine, played by Kristen Bell, the daughter of a private detective, would solve missing homework-type cases at school, but also go home and help her father with the real stuff. You wish she could have remained seventeen forever, but aging is inexorable and it will be the daunting task of the creators to sustain the show's charms as the seasons advance. Even **Veronica Mars The Complete Second Season**, which is available from Warner Home Video (UPC#012569769175, \$60), is messier and less dichotomized than the **First Season** was. Again, there is a mystery that extends through the entire twenty-two episodes—in this case, it is a suspicious school bus crash that kills several students and a teacher—and the neatly wrapped up story from the previous season also starts unwrapping a bit. There are still individual narratives for most of the various episodes, in which Bell's character solves a mystery of some sort (and a nice little piece where her friend, played by Percy Daggs III, solves a mystery in her absence), but the plots tend to be more elaborate and less compartmentalized, often leading to two or three-episode arcs that build additional components to the overall mystery. The show is still highly satisfying and Bell is quite irresistible, but like a kitten that becomes a cat, it just isn't as cute as it was in the beginning.

The season is spread to six platters and every platter has a 'Play All' option. The chapter encoding is reliable in taking you past the opening credits. The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The picture transfer has no problems and the stereo surround sound supplies a basic dimensionality. There are optional French and Spanish subtitles, and English closed captioning. The first five platters contain deleted scenes that run a total of 28 minutes. Most of the scenes take the characters to points more extreme than what was left in, but there are also a few nice moments that just didn't contribute enough to the story to make the running time cut off. On the sixth platter, there are two promotional featurettes running a total of 13 minutes and a decent 8-minute blooper reel.

Extra Raven

Some bizarre Walt Disney Home Entertainment marketing scheme has firmly established itself, adding a 'bonus episode' onto standard collections of episodes from their various cable and broadcast TV shows. Usually it doesn't matter. It is annoying that the 'Play All' option doesn't access the episode, and if you miss it hidden in the special features, you miss it. But why? Why can't all five episodes be available through 'Play All' instead of just four? Does it really make the DVD more exciting, or just more annoying? Especially on a collection such as **That's So Raven Raven's Makeover Madness** (UPC#786936701661, \$20), because the five 22-minute episodes, although manageably freestanding, are also part of a single narrative arc, and so to have the fifth episode removed from the other four is to miss out on part of the continuing story unless you're a special features geek. Raven-Symone, who is in her early twenties but is still, just barely, managing to play a high school student, stars in the series in which her character has brief psychic visions about the future that affect her decisions as she tries either to make the vision come true or prevent it from happening. It is also part of her shtick to put on elaborate disguises. Like many children's cable programs, the performances have a controlled and somewhat mechanical air to them, helped along by the intense editing, but that doesn't mean the actors are bad—its just that the writing is following a precise formula—and the comedic beats are often highly amusing, even when they are fully predictable. In the first three episodes presented, *Pin Palls*, *Dues and Don't's* and *Adventures in Boss Sitting*, the heroine gets a position as an intern at a fashion house run by a prickly designer. In the last two episodes, *Hook Up My Space* and the untitled 'bonus,' the responsibilities from the job motivate her to move her room from the upstairs in her house to the basement. The episodes were originally broadcast in 2006 and are consistently humorous.

The full screen picture is brightly colored and sharp. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound supplies a basic dimensionality to the music and laugh track. There are optional English subtitles and a well-designed trivia game with behind-the-scenes info.

There is also a 'bonus' episode on **The Suite Life of Zack & Cody Taking Over the Tipton** (UPC#786936707441, \$20), although since there is no narrative arc to the episodes, it is just mildly irritating that you have to go to a different menu option to reach it. The show is sort of a variation on *Eloise*, about two mischievous twins who live in a Boston hotel with their

mother (the hotel's lounge singer). There is a decent array of comical characters working or living at the hotel, and the possibilities for guests are endless. There are also parallel plot lines involving the kids and the grownups, so that while the cable program, like the **Raven** program, is oriented towards youngsters, it usually has enough substance to appeal to any viewer. Jesse McCartney guest stars in *Rock Star in the House*, as a number of characters go crazy when he stays at the hotel and do all sorts of wild things to meet him. In *Kisses & Basketball*, one of the heroes has problems with the presence of a girl on his basketball team after she impulsively kisses him. One of the characters, a rich teenager, tries to impress a visiting National Merit Scholar, even though she has difficulty pronouncing 'scholar,' while one of the boys moves out of his room and into a closet because he can't tolerate his brother's sloppiness in *Odd Couples*. The brothers compete for the attentions of a young French guest in *French 101*, and in the unnamed but appealing bonus episode, the highpoint of the collection, the heroes vie for roles in a student production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, while the complications of their own adolescent romances mirror those of the play. The full screen picture is sharp, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is reasonably strong. There are optional English subtitles and a passable 6-minute featurette about the McCartney episode.

More Shots

The first volume of **Jazz Shots from the East Coast** (Aug 06) had some great clips but did not gel as a program because the genres of jazz depicted did not flow well from one clip to the next. That is not the case, however, with the two fantastic volumes that follow in the MVD series, **Jazz Shots from the East Coast Vol.2** (UPC#022891805391, \$20) and **Jazz Shots from the East Coast Vol.3** (UPC#022891805496, \$20).

Each program is a collection of black-and-white and color clips from TV broadcasts and short films. The music is mostly monophonic, but effectively engineered to provide a smooth and stable delivery. The image quality varies from clip to clip, but the performers are usually in full view, and it can often be exciting to put images to numbers you have heard for years only as audio recordings.

Vol.2 runs 74 minutes and includes a Miles Davis number with John Coltrane (you dare not blink when the camera turns to him), a Charlie Parker piece, Louis Armstrong (the charming heart of the collection), Art Blakey, Ben Webster (a satisfying segment in which his lengthy solos contrast well to the busier band numbers elsewhere in the collection), Art Farmer, Count Basie, Art Tatum (in a very nice, seemingly genuine basement nightclub setting), Bobby Hackett and the Modern Jazz Quartet.

Vol.3 runs 95 minutes and contains more fantastic Coltrane, Davis, Duke Ellington, early Wynton Marsalis, Dizzy Gillespie with Lalo Schiffrin (hey, shouldn't they be West Coast? No matter, it's a great set...), Thad Jones & Mel Lewis (a studious piece that is nicely contrasted with the freer segments surrounding it), Jimmy Smith (doing *Walk on the Wild Side!*), Woody Herman, Sonny Rollins and Pony Pointdexter.

More Chuck

Last month we mistakenly identified the list price of **Chuck Berry: Hail! Hail! Rock 'N' Roll** as being \$50. It is actually listed at \$30. The \$50 release is **Chuck Berry: Hail! Hail! Rock 'N' Roll The Ultimate Collector's Edition** (UPC#014381315622), which, in addition to the two fabulous platters of music and interviews that appear on the standard release, holds two more platters of spellbinding interviews.

The third platter may well be the highpoint of the entire set, original concert included. Berry, Little Richard and Bo Diddley sit together for 58 minutes, reminiscing about the old days, talking about compositional strategies, their first gigs, and their lives as rock 'n roll stars. Also featured is a great 31-minute segment in which Robbie Robertson and Berry look over Berry's scrapbook, and Robertson peppers Berry with questions inspired by the items they come across. They talk about Berry's life as a performer and share many fascinating tales about rolling with the good times. Additionally there is an 18-minute collection of clips featuring Berry talking about his life and even reciting poetry from memory.

The fourth platter contains interviews with other musical figures not only talking about Berry, but also about their own experiences and lives as the director, Taylor Hackford, essentially probes each one to get as much information as he can about their history and their music. Each clip runs 10 minutes. The interviewees are Jerry Lee Lewis, Diddley, The Everly Brothers, Willie Dixon, Roy Orbison, Sam Phillips and Ahmet Ertegun.

Busy Priest

Sporting your standard whips, chains and leather, the heavy metal rock band, Judas Priest, delivers an energetic 95-minute concert on the Columbia Music Video release, **Judas Priest Live Vengeance '82** (UPC#0746-45839790, \$15). Shot in Memphis in 1982, the hard-working band is backed up by a laser light show, and cavort with an earnestness that befits their chosen costumes, delivering an efficient and fully satisfying performance. The full screen picture is a little grainy, but is otherwise clear and provides decent close-ups of the band members in action. The 5.1 channel Dolby Digital sound does not have the full power or detail of a more recent mix, but the audio is reasonably smooth and strong, and the vocals are especially clear. There is no captioning.