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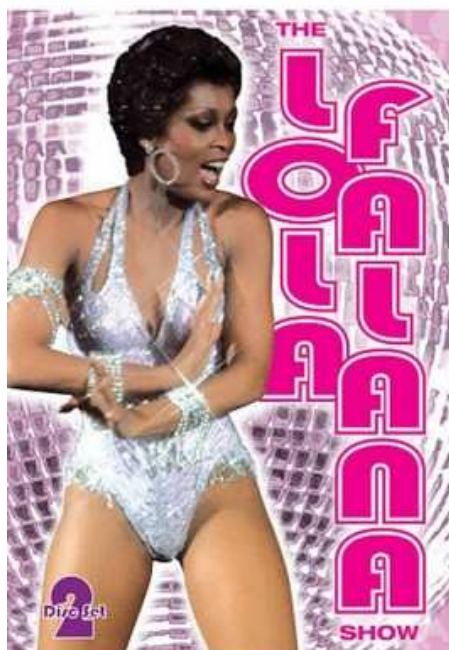
## The Lola Falana Show (1976 TV Specials/VSC/MVD DVD Set)

Picture: C    Sound: C  
Extras: C+    Specials: B-

Discovered by Sammy Davis Jr., Lola Falana became a huge sensation in Las Vegas and made a serious, ambitious attempt to become the next big singing star, though she had many other talents. Before ABC surprised the whole industry and became the #1 network (before NBC did it), the network backed four variety show TV specials. They have not been seen in decades, but are now collected on a new DVD set rightly entitled **The Lola Falana Show**.

From the producers who made variety show TV series hits with stars like Sonny & Cher, The Hudson Brothers and more, Falana gave it her all and was able to get some very impressive talent to join her. The four specials and their main guest stars are:

- 1) Muhammad Ali & Hal Linden
- 2) Billy Dee Williams & Gabe Kaplan
- 3) Redd Foxx and Dick Van Dyke
- 4) Art Carney & Dennis Weaver



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Changing dresses as often as Diana Ross (who she is trying to follow in the footsteps of commercially here down to more than a few covers of Motown Records hits), each show is a decent mix of musical numbers (sometimes she is alone, sometimes with an audience and also dancing and just about always singing) and various comedy skits, this never developed into a hit series (The Hudson Brothers also did specials before they got their show, which you can see from the same DVD companies elsewhere on this site) but it was still very rare for any woman (let alone a black woman) to have a TV show of any kind at the time.

However, it is a terrific time capsule and though Falana never had a hit record, she was amazing and this captures her at the peak of her powers. The writers could not make all the skits work here and the jokes written for her put her out of her element, which is atypical of the team behind the show. Maybe if they mixed things up from show to show, this could have been seen as four pilots, but it is long overdue for these shows to surface. They are from that last golden period of TV Variety Shows and as compared to others, hold up well enough.


- > **Harry Potter & The Chamber Of Secrets: Year 2 – Ultimate Edition (Warner Blu-ray) + Harry Potter & The Half Blood Prince: Year 6 (Warner Blu-ray + DVD w/Digital Copy)**
- > **Super Friends! – Season One, Volume Two (1973 aka Superfriends!/Warner DVD)**
- > **Knock 'Em Dead, Kid (2009/On-Line Distribution Feature Review)**
- > **Mirageman (2007/MagNet /Magnolia DVD)**
- > **The Hangover – Unrated (2009/Warner Blu-ray + DVD)**
- > **Heat (1995/Warner Blu-ray)**
- > **This Beautiful City (2007/Cinema Epoch DVD)**
- > **(500) Days Of Summer (2009/Fox Blu-ray)**

Regulars included Pat Morita, Murray Langston & Ted Zeigler (regulars on many of these shows which they wrote on with an unseen Alan Thicke), plus surprise guests including Bill Cosby, Sonny & Cher, Dinah Shore, plus an unknown Richard Kiel (Jaws in the James Bond films). It reminds us how much more of a performance and entertainment community with real talent existed back then versus the wasteland that has replaced it. Yes, it could be corny, but that was better than void of talent, sense of humor and void of respect for the audience. That is why they are all worth revisiting.

The 1.33 X 1 image was shot on analog professional NTSC videotape (the 2" reel-to-reel kind) and looks a little weaker than expected, though color is consistent. The Dolby Digital 2.0 Mono is a little on the flat side and both may be a generation down or were just transferred in a slightly off way. Extras includes a brief text biography on Falana on DVD 1 and DVD 2 adds stills and an audio commentary on the third special with music and pop culture scholar Nelson George worth hearing after you see all four shows. Let's hope VSC and MVD get the rest of these types of shows on DVD ASAP.

- Nicholas Sheffo

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