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## New on DVD: Alastair Sim and Will Hay farces, Evelyn Waugh satires

 January 22, 4:54 PM | [LA/OC Arts Examiner](#) | [Jordan Young](#)

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Decades before Monty Python, a number of homegrown comedians and comic actors proved adept at tickling British funny bones. Happily, two have resurfaced in the US on new DVD releases. **Will Hay**, famed for playing incompetent schoolmasters, plays a seedy lawyer marked for an untimely end by a criminal client whose defense he bungled, in ["My Learned Friend."](#) Sadly, this 1943 Ealing comedy that teamed him with comic Claude Hulbert was his last, due to failing health.

**Alastair Sim**, best known for his portrayal of Scrooge in the beloved 1951 film of "A Christmas Carol," is back on view in ["The Belle of St. Trinian's."](#) He's hilarious in this madcap 1954 comedy—based on the cartoons of Ronald Searle—in a dual role, as the dotty headmistress of a girl's school, and her bookmaker brother. Sim is supported by a gaggle of able farceurs, including Joyce Grenfell, Irene Handl, Beryl Reid and Sid James. (Both DVDs are from WHAM! USA, distributed by MVD).

The heyday of comedy and drama in that quaint country across the pond is also recalled in ["The A-Z of British Radio,"](#) new in paperback. You can read about "The Goon Show," a prime influence on the Pythons, and perpetrators Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers; Will Hay is not included despite his popularity on radio, but monologist Joyce Grenfell is. You'll also find humorists Gerard Hoffnung and Tony Hancock, bandleaders Billy Cotton and Henry Hall, veteran broadcaster Alastair Cooke, and Val Gielgud (brother of John), the father of British radio drama. (Published by Scarecrow Press).

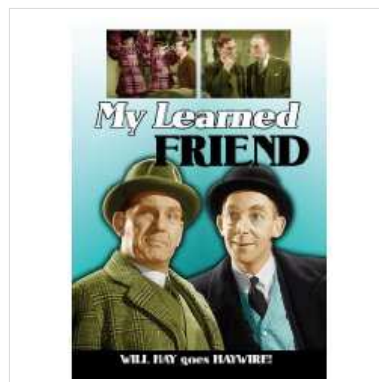
With Britcoms all the rage on American TV, what amuses denizens of the UK these days is no secret. ["The Evelyn Waugh Collection,"](#) a pair of biting satires arriving on DVD next month, reminds us their humor can be pretty classy stuff at times. "A Handful of Dust" stars Kristin Scott Thomas, along with Alec Guinness, Judi Dench, and Anjelica Huston; "Scoop" features Michael Maloney, Donald Pleasence and Denholm Elliott. (Released by Acorn Media).

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