

Reviews of recent and upcoming DVD releases

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(MCT)

"Ratatouille" (G, 2007, Disney/Pixar)

There's Pixar, and there's everyone else, and for those who need a reminder as to why that is, this story of a culturally-refined rat who takes Paris by storm will more than do. "Ratatouille" marks the return of Brad "The Incredibles" Bird to the director's chair, and Bird once again answers the call by advancing the notion of what a computer-animated film can accomplish. This time, instead of delivering a film starring (gasp!) people, Bird creates the first Pixar film that doesn't coast on a gimmick. A family of rats doesn't seem too far removed from the gaggle of toys, bugs, monsters, marine life, superheroes or cars that powered previous films, but the film's human characters and the world in which they live garners just as much screen time as the rats. When those worlds collide, "Ratatouille" ascends to a different plane of storytelling than the usual Pixar fare _ immensely good news for anyone who found last year's "Cars" too formulaic for comfort. For those who don't care about any of that, though, worry not: Per usual, "Ratatouille" is (a) extremely funny, (b) satisfying the whole way through and © unbelievably good-looking. All the bases are covered.

Extras: Two short films ("Your Friend the Rat" and "Lifted"), behind-the-scenes feature, deleted scenes.

_ More Pixar this week: "Pixar Short Films Collection, Volume 1" (NR, 2007, Disney/Pixar): You know those awesome little shorts that play before most Pixar films? They're finally together in what is one of the more overdue animated compilations of the DVD era. It's a shame there isn't any cutting-room floor material, though. Includes 13 shorts, plus commentary, a 23-minute retrospective, and four shorts that appeared on "Sesame Street."

"Sicko" (PG-13, 2007, The Weinstein Co.)

Michael Moore is, at this point, damaged goods. By extension, so are his films. As such, while a fearless, big-budget examination of America's healthcare system is long overdue, "Sicko" is hopelessly ill fit to provide any sweeping value beyond whatever entertainment value it imparts while running. Moore is immensely gifted in the art of presentation, and "Sicko" is an enormously compelling movie with some unforgettable stories about good people losing an unfair fight to big medicine. But Moore's tendency to paint some arguments with laughably broad strokes gives his film a credibility issue. (Anyone with relatives living outside the United States, for instance, can tell you that socialized medicine isn't the foolproof idea Moore paints it to be here.) Once that problem enters the picture, questions arise, as they always do, about what else Moore feels like brushing over. Not that any of this matters, of course; Moore is far too polarizing a figure at this point to make any meaningful difference in the first place. The choir will follow him off a cliff, and his ability to strike fear into the hearts of executives is second to none, but any chance of rousing the general public has long passed him by.

Extras: Eight bonus segments (some of which were produced after the film's theatrical

release), interview gallery, music video.

"Amazing Journey: The Story of the Who" (NR, 2007, Universal)

Every music fan should be so lucky to have a film about their favorite band that's in the same echelon as what fans of The Who now have. "Amazing Journey: The Story of the Who" is just what its title says: two hours of stories about Roger, Pete, Keith, John and eventually Kenney. What makes it so engaging, on top of a barrage of compelling images and footage, is the personal touch that ties it all together. The likes of Noel Gallagher, Eddie Vedder and The Edge pop in to share their thoughts, but the vast majority of "Journey" comes straight from the mouths of both the band's surviving members and the behind-the-scenes people who witnessed the ride up close. Punches aren't pulled, either. "Journey" packs a lot of storytelling into two hours _ so much, in fact, that some will take umbrage with how quickly the story of Keith Moon's passing rolls by. Beyond that arguable misstep, however, "Journey" rolls along at a perfect pace _ measured enough to tell the story right, but relentless enough to prevent a dull moment from slipping in.

Extras: A second disc with a second, six-part, two-hour documentary, concert footage from 1964 (earliest known footage of the band playing together), scrapbook, 11-page booklet.

"Project Runway 3: The Complete Third Season" (NR, 2006, Weinstein Co.)

How good is "Project Runway," you ask? "Project Runway" is so good, you don't even need to love, like or even understand fashion to get into it. It's also so good, you can hate reality programming and still love this. "Runway" is 15 desperate artists at the top of their game, on the cusp of their dream life and not necessarily equipped to not blow it all with one stupid mistake. That's good drama in any genre, and "Runway" is loaded with enough talent and failure _ and sometimes both at once _ to elevate itself well beyond the sphere of most reality shows. Furthermore, the various competitions that separate the professionals from the amateurs are often pretty ingenious. If you're worried that a show about 15 fashion designers translates into unbearable pretension and stuffiness, no need: "Runway's" contestants are an odd lot, but only a few of them are genuinely full of themselves to the point of derision, and they merely satisfy the villain quotient that any good show needs.

Contents: 15 extended episodes, plus updates on the finalists (which, sadly, are spoiled on the back of the case, so ignore that if you want to be surprised), Tim Gunn feature, Gunn's season blog, outtakes and designer bios.

"I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry (PG-13, 2007, Universal)

He's Chuck (Adam Sandler)! And he's Larry (Kevin James)! They're firefighters, and due to a complicated scenario involving pension plans and Larry's kids and late wife, they're pretending not only to be gay, but married to each other. Hilarious, right? Hey, it could have been. On the Hollywood wheel of topics to milk dry, gay marriage represents an uncharted land with boundless material. That's an exciting circumstance for some comedy writers, but an entirely terrifying proposition for "I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry," which is too afraid to be anything but yet another broad collection of fat and fart jokes. "C&L" isn't sure whether it would profit more from making fun of gays or sticking up for

them, so it simply does both and calls it a day, not so much as bending a blade of grass in that uncharted frontier outside of a funny one-liner or two. If the objective was to offend as few people as possible, mission accomplished _ unless, of course, you consider wasting some hard-earned money and two hours of your time offensive. Jessica Biel and Ving Rhames also star.

Extras: Director-only commentary, James/Sandler/director commentary, deleted scenes (with commentary), five behind-the-scenes features.

"Danny Roane: First Time Director" (R, 2006, Lions Gate)

It's ever so en vogue to make a mockumentary these days ... and why not? As Christopher Guest, "The Office" and even "Surf's Up" have shown us, the mockumentary is a comedic goldmine when done right. The flip side, of course, is that when someone doesn't know what they're doing, disaster ensues. Take, for instance, "Danny Roane: First Time Director." It stars and was written and directed by Andy Dick, and it's 84 minutes of unadulterated disaster. Dick goes through the mockumentary motions _ the weird cutaways, the awkward dialogue, the foot-in-mouth one-liners that give everything a faux-improvised feel. But it's simply not funny, nor is it even particularly coherent. "Roane" isn't even offensive, which at least would give it some trainwreck points. The final tally: a series of first takes cobbled into one agonizing, seemingly endless story of a former sitcom star who took a disastrous stab at writing and directing a film. If you're waiting for the space-time continuum to fold on itself, you're not alone.

Extras: Outtakes, extended scenes (in case they didn't feel too long already).

More TV Worth Watching on DVD

_ "Veronica Mars: The Complete Third Season" (NR, 2006, Warner Bros.): That this show even reached a third season is something of a television miracle, so we should probably be thankful for what we got. At least the show didn't lose a step in its final hurrah, which finds Veronica (Kristen Bell) transitioning from high school student-slash-private detective into college freshman-slash-private detective. Includes 20 episodes, plus deleted scenes, bloopers, webisodes, multi-part behind-the-scenes feature, season four pitch feature.

_ "Sesame Street: Old School, Volume 2: 1974-1979" (NR, 1974, Genius Entertainment): This entirely overdue collection is what it claims to be _ hours of classic "Sesame Street" segments that, until now, were impossible to revisit. In addition to that sweet deal, "Volume 2" piles on the first episode ever made (which never has been broadcast), uncut premiere episodes from each of the six covered years, a 12-page booklet and an animation cel from the "Pinball Number Count" segment.

_ "Twin Peaks: Definitive Gold Box Edition" (NR, 1990, CBS/Paramount): Odds are, if you live anywhere but under a rock, you've heard a thing or two about how bizarre this series was in its brief time on television. Chances to see for yourself have popped up, but none have been as inviting as this set, which compiles the whole series into one box. Includes 29 episodes, plus deleted scenes, a feature-length behind-the-scenes documentary, David Lynch feature, fan feature, interactive map, the "Saturday Night Live" sketch, music video, promo spots, galleries and more.

_ "Scrubs: The Complete Sixth Season" (NR, 2006, Buena Vista): It's more of the same.

But until "Scrubs" runs out of genuinely funny and/or saccharine observations about the medical profession, that's just fine. And hey, there's singing and dancing this time! Includes 22 episodes, plus commentary, a feature on the musical episode, interviews, deleted scenes, alternate lines, outtakes and bloopers.

(Billy O'Keefe writes video game and DVD reviews for McClatchy-Tribune News Service.)

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