

The picture is presented on one side in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, an in full screen format on the other side. The full screen image lops off picture information and the letterbox framing has a stronger, movie feel to it. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has some serviceable separation effects but is not overly elaborate or especially high powered. The 87-minute program has alternate French and Spanish tracks in 5.1 Dolby, optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, and a 5-minute segment on the voice talent, a 4-minute promo that appeared on the Internet, and 24 minutes of deleted and alternate scenes in various stages of animation and narrated by the film's director, Kevin Munroe. Munroe also supplies a commentary for the film, talking about the specific animation effects, the voice cast, and the film's conceptualization. "It was sort of a movie done by people who played with action figures way too much as kids. That's sort of the general vibe we wanted to go for."

Ultraman revisited

The two Ultraman programs released by Tsuburaya and Image Entertainment, **Ultraman Tiga & Ultraman Dyna** (UPC#014381038729, \$20) and **Ultraman Gaia The Battle in Hyperspace** (UPC#014381038828, \$20), come from the late Nineties and feature improved special effects in comparison to the original Ultraman shows. **Tyga & Dyna**, from 1998, is a satisfying effort for fans, but **Battle in Hyperspace**, from 1999, will only be of interest to children. Japanese in concept, 'Ultraman' is a large, expressionless robot operated from the inside by an emotional soldier, which fights equally large monsters amid equally tall buildings, powerlines and other obstacles. Although still staged with rubber suits, there are many computer graphic inserts and slickly blended mattes. In **Tyga & Dyna**, bad guys probe the hero's thoughts and learn all of his moves, so when they attack, they can counter his every punch. He loses heart for a while, but is then persuaded that it is the power of his team that gives him strength and he is revived, inspiring another hero to come out of retirement and join in the fight as well. Running just 68 minutes, the narrative goes through the usual gyrations of setback and triumph, but is over well before the drama can become tiresome. **Battle in Hyperspace**, from 1999, is set in our world, where Ultraman is simply a toy, but a young boy discovers a strange ball that opens up a link to another dimension where Ultraman is real, and causes the hero to cross over. Bullies then get a hold of the ball, and bring over some monsters. There are a few moments of strikingly nice effects, but way too much playground drama to sustain an adult's interest for the 74-minute running time.

Both programs are presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. On both, the color transfer is sharp and fresh. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a basic dimensionality and reasonably strong tones. There is both a Japanese track with optional English subtitles, or, for kids, an awkwardly dubbed English track. Trailers are also included.

Near the water

Part travelog, part sociological exploration, part history and part portraiture, **On the Waterways**, a 1991 documentary series released by MPI Home Video (UPC030306748993, \$30), is a spellbinding journey across the eastern half of the United States and the lower edge of Canada. As the narrator, Jason Robards, explains at the beginning of each of the thirteen 59-minute episodes, the program was created through an endowment that allowed a research team and a rotating group of college interns to travel by boat along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts of the United States, the Great Lakes, and up and down several major inland water passages, such as the Mississippi and the Erie Canal. As they stop along the way, they visit sites, meet people, research the local past, and try to get a handle on the economic dynamics of the area. Sometimes they profile political activists, sometimes it is the owners of a restaurant or other local business, sometimes it is a worker in a factory or some other grueling vocation (often related to the water), and once in a while, it is a celebrity who has found an isolated island or peninsula to call his own. Each segment may seem like it could be used as soft filler in a local news broadcast, but the unifying motif of life on the water creates a greater and more compelling narrative momentum, making you look continually forward, as you watch the show, to seeing what will be 'around the next bend.'

There is no 'Play All' option. Every episode is about a section of the journey, and the episodes are presented in a jumbled order so there is no real starting or ending point, although within each episode, a specific path is followed from beginning to end. It's the America you know, even if you don't live near the water. The United States they look at is the United States of the Eighties, with burgeoning environmental fights and the Rust Belt in the final stages of its massive but not complete collapse. But the people and the neighborhoods are the people and neighborhoods that will always be around regardless of economic upswings or downswings, or changes in technology and fashion. Beneath every episode, too, is an unspoken search for what draws people to live and work so close to the water, and it is a testament to the quality of the series that you absorb those emotions as you immerse yourself in each story the filmmakers pour out for you.

The full screen picture is crisp, with accurate colors. The show's theme music is mildly stereophonic, but most of the sound is centered. There are optional English subtitles.

They're all still better than Traffic

A 60-minute countdown of **The 50 Worst Movies Ever Made** is available from Passport Video (UPC#025493157291, \$10), although for most dedicated cineastes, what the program really becomes is a shopping list. Drawing mostly from the Fifties, Sixties, Seventies and Eighties, the show revisits a few big-budget classics (**Ishtar**, **Xanadu**, **Howard the Duck**), covers most of the basics (**Santa Claus Conquers the Martians**, **Eegah**, **The Robot Monster**, and, of course, **Plan Nine from Outer Space**), uncovers a few forgotten gems (**The Fat Spy**, **The Three Stooges in Outer Space**, **Firebird 2015 AD**), and otherwise focuses on cheaply made exploitation features and bizarrely dubbed imports. While most of the footage comes from trailers, other public domain sources may have been utilized as well. The narration includes scattered background information on some of the films and delivers its share of chuckles. While the sampler may not be definitive, it does present a general idea of what happens when dreams of Oscars turn to nightmares. Funny nightmares.

The full screen picture quality (some of the clips are slightly letterboxed) varies from segment to segment, but most are tolerable, as is the monophonic sound. There is no captioning.

Sixties rock doc

An excellent 1968 BBC pop music documentary, **All My Loving**, has been released by Voiceprint (UPC#604388679607, \$20). The film is similar to the long version of **Cream Farewell Concert** (Aug 06), both of which were directed by Tony Palmer, and attempts to introduce the dynamics of the counter-culture and its influences on pop to a general audience, utilizing fantastic performance clips and wonderful interviews with such luminaries as Derek Taylor, Frank Zappa, Keith Moon, Donovan, Paul McCartney, George Martin (who talks about putting backward sounds in songs), and so on. The 55-minute film has a clear-eyed view of both the record business and the artistic revolution, and is as valuable for its legitimate insights on the Sixties zeitgeist as it is for its terrific music segments.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The quality of the clips changes from segment to segment, but the source material is adequately preserved. The monophonic sound is clear and satisfying. There is no captioning. Also featured is a minute-long montage of Ralph Steadman art depicting various Sixties rock figures and a good 41-minute interview with Palmer about making the movie and the various personalities he profiled.

Horn on the ivories

After a short introduction, Shirley Horn sits at a piano, playing and singing, on the 78-minute **Shirley Horn: Live at the Village Vanguard**, a Lucy II Productions, Inc. Image Entertainment release (UPC#014381380729, \$20). Moving back far enough at times to take in the accompanying drums and electric bass, the camera stays in close during most of the set, not that there'd be much room to move around in the intimate venue, anyway. Horn's song selection is a nice selection of less common standards, including *I've Got the World on a String* and *I'm Just Fooling Myself*, with the highpoint of the 1991 performance probably being the effectively conveyed double entendres of *Nice & Easy*. The full screen picture is sharp, and while the stage lights make the fleshtones look a little too orange, the color transfer appears accurate. The stereo sound has a reasonable dimensionality, and there is no captioning.

Holding on to the Sixties

Another compilation of performance clips from Orlando's Rock 'n Roll Palace, MVD's **Cruisin' Hits of the 60's** (UPC#022891661092, \$13), the 2006 collection is bookended by Wolfman Jack (he sings *Shake Rattle & Roll* and *Old Time Rock 'n Roll*), and features a wide variety of singers attempting to resurrect their pasts, from Tommy Sands and Tommy Roe to Martha Reeves and Roger McGuinn. The collections are starting to overlap—this is the third or maybe the fourth time Bobby Vee's *Rubber Ball* has appeared in a Palace anthology, but it is generally one of the better samplings, with few low points and plenty of choice moments, our favorite being Ray Peterson's articulate and earnest rendition of *Tell Laura I Love Her*. The 33-minute program features twenty numbers and is in full screen format only.

Boy Dolls

Dressed in black, but with brightly colored hair and matching guitars, the energetic male British punk band, The Toy Dolls, performs for 73 minutes in a 2004 concert on **The Toy Dolls Our Last DVD?**, an MVD release (UPC#022891450597, \$20). The band's musicianship is more accomplished than the exaggerations of their act imply, and they tend to let the audience fill in passages in a lot of their numbers, but it is still a fairly solid show, full of blazing guitars and cynical lyrics. The full screen picture is very sharp despite the limitations of the set's lighting, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is reasonably clear, with recognizable separations. There is no captioning. Also featured is 37 minutes of rehearsal footage in some sort of practice room that has a better, rawer feel to it than what the band does live, and a 43-minute interview with the band's leader, known as 'Olga,' talking about the tour and the music. There is also a 2-minute montage of tour photos and a text profile of the band.

The picture quality varies from chapter to chapter, but is often a little on the soft side. The stereo sound has a basic dimensionality and is adequately presented. There is no captioning. Text profiles of the artists are also included.