



Animated 'Batman' has super action

Batman, The Animated Series, Vol. 3
Bruce Timm, series producer
Warner Home Video
Four-disc set



I haven't seen "Batman Begins" but it has to bring a lot to be better than the animated series from the '90s.

This is the series that re-energized the super hero cartoon format. Yes, there are traces of anime, but there's more of a 1920s-meets-the-'90s thing going on.

Since this was the last season, series director Bruce Timm had his folks pull out all the stops. Rarely heard from villains got a lot of play and the regular cast of zanies kicked the craziness up a notch.

How could you not like a series that features Ra's Al Ghul, one of Batman's earliest foes? The caped one even teams up with him in "Demon's Quest."

And of course there's "Bane," the episode and character: This is the guy who broke Batman's back in the comic book. He was used sparingly in the dreadful "Batman & Robin." He makes a perfect foe in the series.

What makes this season and series tick is the writing and voices. Kevin Conroy is perfect as the brooding Batman and playboy Bruce Wayne. He's gotten even better in the subsequent "Justice League" series.

This DVD features few extras. There are some commentaries on four episodes but not much else.

No matter: This is still one of the best-animated series to ever grace television. Now if Timm and company would put together such a package for "Justice League."



Original 'Bewitched' a classic on DVD

Bewitched Complete First Season
Columbia Tri-Star Home Video
Black & White
4-disc set



Long before there was the power of three or Harry Potter, Elizabeth Montgomery twitched her nose into prime-time success with "Bewitched," the long-running ABC series.

Montgomery was Samantha Stephens, a sexy suburban housewife who had the dirty secret of being a witch, which she tried to keep from her husband Darrin, played by Dick York from 1962-'69.

Oops, didn't work. There was no way her demanding mother Endora (the wonderful Agnes Moorehead) or hammy father Maurice (the equally wonderful Maurice Evans) were going to let that happen. There was also the wickedly funny assortment of weird relatives that were to follow that made this one of the best '60s sitcoms.

The series broke lots of ground. The Stephens were the first couple to sleep in the same bed, a significant step for a fledgling medium. Some also credit them as the first mixed couple (witch-mortal) but I say that goes to Lucy and Ricky Ricardo (Anglo-Cuban). And Endora and Maurice were divorced, or so we thought. That wasn't your usual sitcom status.

But it was the chemistry of the cast that made this sitcom outstanding. Marion Lorne as the addle-brained Aunt Clara is one of the best supporting characters in TV history. And the nosy Mrs. Kravitz - Alice Pearce - is one for the ages.

More than 30 episodes are spread across four discs with a few extra features. You can get a colorized version, but purists will have to have the crisp black and white original. This is a must have for '60s fanatics and those who love good television.

MARTIN LAWRENCE REBOUNDED

A COMEDY WHERE OLD SCHOOL ...MEETS MIDDLE SCHOOL

CAST: MARTIN LAWRENCE, "FREEDOM" WENDY PALMER, ROBINSON GREEN, MEYER, HORATIO SANZ, ANCHOR HERRING, "REAR WINDOW" TOMMY LEE, "HAROLD & KERRY" JIM BELUSHI, "LAW & ORDER" JAMES VAN DER BEEK, "THE MENTALIST" JAMES SPONG ASPERS, "THEY" TERRY CASTELLUCCI, "THE MENTALIST" MARTIN LAWRENCE, "TRACY BRECHER" TERRY O'QUINN, "THE MENTALIST" PAUL TRAYNOR, "THE MENTALIST" JON LUICK, "THE MENTALIST" SCOTT MOORE

PG PARENTAL STRONG SUGGESTION: SOME MATERIAL MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN. 11-17

STARTS FRIDAY, JULY 1

Common discusses his new album and old flame

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK -Common's sixth album is also his shortest, and perhaps his best.

"Be," which is in stores now, checks in at a slender 11 tracks, reminiscent of short classic rap LPs like Nas' "Illmatic," Eric B. & Rakim's "Paid in Full," and KRS-One's "Criminal Minded." After disappointing his hardcore fans with his last effort, the exploratory "Electric Circus" in 2002, Common retreated back into the studio with longtime friend Kanye West and Detroit producer Jay Dee. The result was the critically acclaimed "Be," which leans on Common's raw lyrical artistry of clever rhymes and metaphors.

Now 33, the artist born Lonnie Rashid Lynn on Chicago's South Side spoke to The Associated Press about love, life and redemption.

AP: The buzz on this album is that it's going to save hip-hop. Do you think hip-hop needs to be born again?

Common: I definitely think it needs some repairing. I can say, as a fan, it ain't been satisfying and feeding my soul the way hip-hop has always done in the past. I think that I'm one person that can bring a balance to it. Hip-hop has become so much of a business, so much of a hustle, that the art of it has lost its purity and its innocence.

AP: You've been dubbed everything from a sort-of gangster to socially con-

scious. Does the latter fluster you?

Common: At first it did because I was talking about God, growing, but I wasn't all perfect. I didn't realize that once you talked about (things like) abortion, God, that people would only come to expect that. I feel now that being conscious is a blessing because that means you are aware. Like, just because I am talking about something conscious, they separated me from Jay-Z. And he might be talking about getting paper, but that doesn't mean we ain't part of the same culture.

AP: You're one of Jay-Z's favorite MCs.

Common: That's an honor, like getting respect from one of the greatest. ... Jay-Z changed the movement of, like, black society. He can say, "Yo, I'm wearing button-up shirts," and a whole generation of people (is) wearing button-up shirts instead of throwbacks.

AP: Creatively speaking, what was the lowest point of your career?

Common: Creatively, it's between two albums, "Can I Borrow a Dollar" and "Electric Circus."

AP: Perhaps your fans didn't believe that the album essentially came from within you, rather more from your then-girlfriend Erykah Badu.

Common: (Laughs.) The album was all me at that time. I go through changes. If you look at my career, I started off holding a 40-ounce (of beer) on my first cover. I grow and I go through changes. I think that there was a period in my life that I was trying to find myself, maybe trying to find myself.

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