Picking the right demo disc for your home theater

By Vincent Civitillo  
Managing Editor

With the costs of high-end home theater systems falling and the popular-
ity rising, putting together a theater-like entertainment center has become easier over the past year or so.

However, many find that after they've finished hooking up their brand new high-definition TV and 6.1 surround speakers, that the DVDs they pick to show off their new gear are nowhere near fit for the task.

But don't get frustrated just yet. Picking the right demo disc can be hard and depend largely on individual tastes. Here, you'll find some of the market's best in both video and audio categories, sure to impress the next time you call over your friends.

Video

Picking the right title to show off a new TV can be very difficult. The results are typically more subtle and many people don't have the technical savvy to tell the difference between a good transfer and a great one, so when choosing a disc to demonstrate the power behind your TV, the best choice is to go with the best of the best.

Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones (widescreen): George Lucas' second Star Wars prequel, the first live-action movie ever to be filmed entirely digitally, has a pristine print free of distracting edge-enhancement halos and compression artifacts. Colors are strong and detail is fine, particularly during the Teasing a Senator sequence. The battle of Geonosis scene, however, boasts an incredible surround track with multi-channeling of lightsabers and laser blasts that puts the viewer right in the middle of the action, making this a great disc to use to show off both a new TV and a high-end surround system all at once.

Charlie's Angels (Superbit Deluxe Edition): Columbia's Superbit DVD lineup has been known for its demo-quality results, using the entire disc to utilize a higher bit-rate as well as both a Dolby Digital 5.1 and DTS surround track, but certain movies lend themselves to this sort of transfer better than others. Angels', with its bright and vibrant colors (and not to mention feminine eye-candy in stars Lucy Liu, Cameron Diaz and Drew Barrymore), make it a great film to put your TV to the test. For the most searching of results with this title, try selecting the race scene.

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (Platinum Extended Edition) — New Line's transfers for these extended editions have been enriched with such detail that it's hard to imagine any DVD surpassing them in terms of image quality. However, the two sets currently available (Fellowship and Towers) differ greatly in presentation, primarily as a result of the source material. Those looking for a bright and colorful movie will be wiser in picking Fellowship, whereas the darker, grey-tones of Towers may not be the best choice in showing off the color capabilities of a high-definition big screen.

Audio

Finding the right disc to show off a surround system is somewhat easier, as surround tracks are usually pretty hit or miss. DTS (Digital Theater Systems) mixes are of a higher bit-rate than Dolby counterparts and are thus the preferred tracks for demonstrations. However, Dolby Digital EX mixes, which create a landscape of sound that simulates a rear middle channel can sometimes be just as impressive.

Blade II (Platinum Series): One word: DAMN! Blade II was released on DVD two years ago and no surround track has been as impressive since. Turn on the House of Pain club scene and listen as your subwoofer puts in for some thunderous overtime to keep up with the absolute madness coming out of your speakers. Unfortunately, as it is a movie about vampires fighting vampires, you'll be hard-pressed to find a daylight scene to show off your visual capabilities, but hey, when a disc sounds this good, who's to give a vampire's Fang what it looks like?

Bad Boys (Superbit Edition): There have been three editions of Bad Boys on DVD and while the Special Edition packs a serious punch, the Superbit wins with a tremendous audio and visual presentation. One of the more popular action movies of the last decade, the hangar sequence has the kind of discrete multi-directional channeling other DVDs only wish they did. Listen to one speaker for the sounds of Martin Lawrence's gun, another for his wise-cracks, yet another for the sounds of the guys shooting at him and the two behind you for the explosion when they miss and hit something else.

The Fast and The Furious (Tricked Out Edition): No matter what edition of The Fast and the Furious you choose to pick up, they both feature the same audio and video presentations, so either one is really OK for a sufficient demo. With one of the most hard-hitting DTS tracks in terms of volume and sheer craziness, if you're a car person, crank the volume on the first drag-race of the movie as loud as you can take it and it will blow you away.

‘Passion’ draws forth many emotions

By David Maccar  
News Editor

It is not often that the audience of a sold-out movie theater files out in complete silence as the credits roll, only to speak in low voices when they finally reach the theater lobby. This occurred after a showing of Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ, which opened right on the opening night of Wednesday, Feb. 25, also the Christian holy day, Ash Wednesday which marks the beginning of Lent.

Watching Gibson’s third directional effort is not like seeing a movie at all. There is no plot, no concrete exposition of characters and no English. Its right to sing is Aramaic, Latin or Hebrew with English subtitles.

The Passion is a captivating, violent and nearly structured depiction of the last night and day of Jesus Christ, as told in Luke and John. It is a detailed meditation on the beginning of Lent. Watching Gibson’s third directional effort is not like seeing a movie at all. There is no plot, no concrete exposition of characters and no English. Its right to sing is Aramaic, Latin or Hebrew with English subtitles.

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