



Ralph and Ed and Alice and Trixie: A mother lode of rediscovered 'Honeymooners' shows

flavor. Seething with ill will, just barely in control, John Cleese's Basil Fawlty is a masterpiece of high-energy comic acting. For a proper introduction, start with the tape that contains "The Kipper and The Corpse," in which a guest dies in the night. (Why did Fawlty stash the body in a desk chair? "Well," he says desperately, "he wouldn't fit in the safe, and all the drawers were full.") Blissfully cruel, bitterly funny.

The Old Stuff

A wealth of pre-1960 TV comedy available on video cassette may be of more interest to pop historians than casual viewers. Twenty-two volumes of **The Honeymooners Hidden Episodes**, for example (MPI Video, \$29.95 apiece). Sure Kramden and Norton were funny guys, but 22 volumes? Check into an anthology, "The Best of the Lost Episodes," instead. Rhino Home Video has assembled an evening of situation comedy circa 1953 on **Tee Vee Treasures, Vol. 2** (120 minutes, \$39.95). The material varies—"Beulah," about a sassy but wise black maid, is interesting mainly as a document of a bygone time; "The Trouble With Father" shows off one of the earliest examples of the Bumbling TV Daddy. What's the most fun here are the commercials, including a stunner from Listerine: "Poor Marge. She'll never land a man until she does something about her breath..."

A time trip we can recommend without reservation: **The Best of Spike Jones** (Paramount Home Video, 60 minutes, \$29.95). How better to describe Jones than the way he was introduced in his early-'50s series: "The man who set music back 10,000 years." Jones directs his band, the City Slickers, in tightly orchestrated musical mayhem: guns fire, cannons go off, glass shatters, pots and pans are played like

drums, men dress like women. Words cannot do Spike Jones justice. See it.

The Undead

Time was that a canceled sitcom was history. Not anymore—at least not at Paramount, where canceled sitcoms are re-emerging for a second chance on home video. We wish we could say that this is an entirely good idea. But **Police Squad!** was thin gruel when it ran on ABC in 1982, and it hasn't thickened any lately. The product of the same team who created the movie "Airplane!," "Police Squad!" tries hard to be wacky, and the occasional sight gag scores—in a floor-level tracking shot, for example, the room numbers are mounted at the bottoms of the doors. But the sledgehammer humor wears thin. Six episodes are now available on two video cassettes

(\$39.95 each). Consider that there was a good reason why only six were produced.

Then go look for **Working Stiffs** instead. A nicely low-key sitcom starring Michael Keaton and Jim Belushi, "Working Stiffs" ran for just eight episodes in 1979. But in this case the quick demise was undeserved. The writing is sharp—one character, holding a newborn baby: "Well, it's nice to meet you in person. What? No, I thought you'd be taller, with glasses. I don't know why." And the acting is charming. One can only assume that it was Keaton and Belushi's later successes that led Paramount to rerelease "Working Stiffs." So, a question: where's "Bosom Buddies," starring Tom Hanks and Peter Scolari? Just asking.

Sui generis

Finally, in a class by itself, there is **The Television Parts Home Companion** (Pacific Arts Video Records, \$29.95). Recast from bits of the NBC series "Television Parts," this elegant 40-minute tape includes four musical numbers by Pacific Arts head (and ex-Monkee) Michael Nesmith and a set of weird, brilliant comic sketches. The best: the Dead Ranger, who lived at Alamogordo and climbed the tower one morning to see what was at the top. "Well," he says ruefully, "I got a slight sunburn and woke up in Venezuela." No, wait. The best: Cole Porter's homecoming, in which the songwriter returns to his hometown in Dust Bowl Indiana and gets drafted to write a union song for the starving farmers: "Why so depressed 'bout the Depression? ... I say the Crash is a crashing bore!" No, hold it. The best sketch has to be the voyage of the Kona Tiki, "one man's valiant attempt to cross the Pacific in a Polynesian restaurant." Oh, hell. We don't know. Just watch it. "Television Parts" is visually stunning, utterly odd and funny from start to finish.

BILL BAROL

'The man who set music back 10,000 years': Spike Jones with his band, the City Slickers

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