## Video

**Dance With a Stranger** 

In 1955 Ruth Ellis, a nightclub hostess and divorced mother of two children, became the last woman to be legally hanged in Britain. Dance With a Stranger traces the story of her relationship with the spoiled and weak-willed uppermiddle class brat whom she eventually shot outside his London home. It is a study of what can happen when sexual passion turns to obsession and it builds

with the seeming inevitability of a Greek tragedy. And just as an essential element of classic tragedy involves the refusal of alternative courses of action, so throughout her doomed affair Ellis both exploits yet contemptuously spurns the devoted ministrations of the one man who genuinely loves her. The film's period and society are flawlessly evoked and the lead performances are superb. Miranda Richardson plays Ellis as cheap yet spunky, vain yet vulnerable. Ian Holm is as wonderful as ever in the role of her guardian benefactor, si-lently anguished by unrequited love. Dance With a Stranger is up to the highest standards we expect from the best British drama. **Peter Thomson** 



Director: Christopher Morahan

For over a decade, through Monty Python and Fawlty Towers to The Meaning of Life, we have watched John Cleese developing and refining his screen persona. With Michael Frayn's new comedy, the irascible, bumbling character may well have found his perfect

Cleese plays a headmaster of a modern comprehensive school who is obsessed with efficiency and punctuality: the comedy hinges on the chaos that ensues when he accidentally misses a train which is to deliver him to a conference. The script has all the intricate plotting and infallible logic that one would expect from the playwright who was responsible for the successful Noises Off and the film has the ambling charm if not quite the geniality of a classic Ealing comedy. At heart it's a resolutely old-fashioned piece, which accounts for the heavy-handed treatment of the school scenes at either end of the film and its rather self-satisfied use of stock figures such as the three old women who follow Cleese's wife around in pursuit of her husband.

Clockwise displays interesting parallels with Martin Scorsese's new film After Hours, in which Griffin Dunne plays an unsuspecting young man suddenly drawn into a madcap hurtle around SoHo from dusk to dawn, a wonderfully inventive and unflagging study of people who, in the words of one

commentator, "collide but never come close to connecting." American film is made of a tougher social fibre: although a number of the characters are bizarre and mere caricatures, others, such as Teri Garr's downtrodden waitress, are immensely moving — a far cry from the basic complacency of those caught in the wake of Mr

### **William Dart**

### THE OFFICIAL STORY

Director: Luiz Puenza

I have a sneaking suspicion that some people might have watched Hector Babenco's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and come away thinking that the political violence of South America is a footnote to the genre of 40s Hollywood melodrama. The Official Story puts things right.

Through the eyes of Alicia, a well-to-do bourgeoise woman in Buenos Aires we can see the reconstruction of Argentina and experience, with her, the collective guilt of the nation. In the course of the film, her illusions about the overthrown fascist regime are shattered and she finds that her adopted daughter is probably the child of one of the "desaparecidos," the many people who vanished during Argentina's reign of terror. As she learns more and more of her husband's complicity with the corrupt government, her domestic situation becomes a chilling parallel to the wider political arena, and the film culminates in a moment of horrific, and quite unexpected violence.

Puenza's movie understandably enough entres on a fine performance by Norma Aleandro, who won the best actress award at Cannes for her portrayal of Alicia Although much of it seems far re-

moved from the world we live in. The Official Story reminds us that freedom is a state that must be sought with some vigilance. William Dart

## A ROOM WITH A VIEW

Director: James Ivory
There is much to admire in the almost sculptured precision of James Ivory's screen adaptation of E M Forster's novella, set as it is with a gallery of wonderfully ripe performances from Judi Dench, Maggie Smith and Denholm Elliot Ivory has always been drawn to the dynamics of small groups caught within a wider totality, from the valiant acting company touring India in Shakespeare Wallah to the stranded colonials in Heat and Dust: Forster's study of English isolationism and idiosyncracy must have seemed ready-made

for the director. It is a fragile world, however, and the film is not without its intrusive touches — Kiri Te Kanawa's lush rendition of 'O mio babbino caro' over the credits seems oddly out of place with the rigours of the Florence pensione and I also raised an eyebrow when young Lucy was discovered pounding her way through Beethoven's Waldstein sonata, hardly standard pi ano repertoire for young Victorian ladies. The violent outburst of the street-gang scuffle and a strange scene in which the two young men join the avuncular Reverend Beebe for a romp in the buff seem rather miscalculated.

Balanced against this are the dazzling performances (with the exception of the somewhat hesitant pair of young lovers in Julian Sands and Helena Bonham Carter) and the sheer elegance of the film's construction. Beside the over-inflated canvas of David Lean's *A Passage to India*, Ivory's film is a gem.

Director: Roger Donaldson
Roger Donaldson's second

Stateside film is about as American as the proverbial apple pie with its tale of political corruption in high places ... well, Tennessee. Staunch little Marie Ragghianti manages almost single-handedly to take on the State Governor, as well as coping with a crippled mother and a chronically ill child — you've guessed it, the film is pretty loaded. It goes without say-

ing that all this is just grist to the mill for the plucky Sissy Spacek Spacek is undeniably watchable

even if her male protagonists are fairly forgettable. The exception is Fred Thompson, the noted Watergate lawyer, who plays himself and gives a stunning demonstration of the fine line between theatre and courtroom.

There are disturbing loose ends: we're given a lot of territory to cover in 112 minutes and it seems strange that Marie had to persist in her struggle without some assistance from the burgeoning Women's Liberation movement. The style of the film is insecure and can only be attributed to Donaldson, with the endless sentimentalised scenes with Marie's children reminding one of the worst excesses of Smash

Some years ago, I suggested that Smash Palace was a shameless bid for Hollywood credibility. Now that Donaldson has achieved his evident goal, we find he just can't come up with the goods. William Dart

## WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

Director: Art Linson
It's taken six years for this film,
"based on the twisted legend of Hunter S Thompson", to reach us
— and it's easy to see why. The legend of the original Gonzo journalist has been twisted indeed, but it's not twisted enough. The director chose the slapstick route, and on reflection that was the right decision. The problem is that it's not funny enough — the few laughs are from the *Porky's* school of humour, while Thompson's was

an *intelligent* form of craziness. All the ingredients are here: the strung out writer slugging Wild Turkey as he races to meet a dead-line ... the whining editor of *Blast* magazine bitching over the Mojo wire ... the mad Samoan lawyer ... HST causing chaos on the campaign trail and at the Superbowl. Bill Murray, probably sensing the weak script, is half-hearted, despite the permanent cocktail in

But for Thompson devotees, the film is worthwhile — to see how little can be made from so much — and for the chance to rethink their hero. Alas poor Hunter - the Truman Capote of the

Chris Bourke

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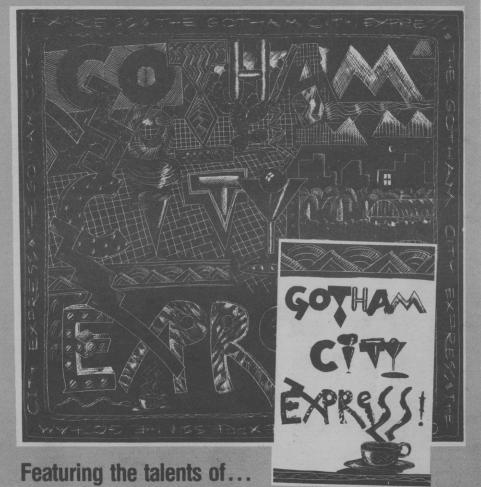


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