

# Film

Reviews by  
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## THE UGLY

Director: Scott Reynolds

Scott Reynolds' 1994 short, *A Game with No Rules* was a killer — a snappy little film noir, dishing up slickly dovetailed evil in the brightest and tackiest colours imaginable. It could certainly teach Reynolds' debut feature a lesson or three.

Serial slaughter is not a pretty subject. It can invoke horror, disgust even, with the right touch of macabre humour behind it, the odd chuckle. *The Ugly* manages little but tedium, as Simon (Paolo Rotundo) works his way around the neighbourhood, razor in hand.

Reynolds' script, with holes you could drive an 18-wheeler through, is a tired affair. The actors either retreat into irretrievable coolness (Roy Ward as the head honcho at the institute) or chew the scenery (Darien Takle as a crazy woman in the institute's hallway). Rebecca Hobbs is efficient enough as 'the enthusiastic but formidably intelligent psychologist' although she's not bright enough to leave young Simon firmly in cuffs.

As Simon slashes his way through the film, his victims return as feeble zombies, sporting what looks like blackberry jelly exuding from their mouths. Let's say that Sam Raimi and George Romero have nothing to fear.

In various interviews around town Reynolds has confessed himself a film buff of manic proportions, yet *The Ugly* has none of the witty genre play of Wes Craven's *Scream*, the ingenious grand guignol of Peter Jackson's movies or the dispassionate horror of John McNaughton's *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, a film that he cites as a prime inspiration. Perhaps Chad Taylor's novel will give Reynolds' second feature, *Heaven*, the structure and coherence that has eluded *The Ugly*.



TRUE LOVE & CHAOS

*Mrs Brown* is a cut above the stuffy Masterpiece Theatre genre that it is doubtlessly destined for. It doesn't answer all the questions it poses, but that doesn't matter. At heart, it deals with the clash between Anglo-Saxon repression and Celtic liberality, the deathless, tight-lipped rituals of the English court with the burly common sense that Connolly delivers so deftly. Nowhere is it better summed up than in two scenes where the Queen and Brown go swimming. Victoria descends from a bathing carriage in full ankles-to-neck costume; Connolly and his brother hurl their clothes onto the sand and dash in.

It's a film which mingles sadness and ruthlessness, beautifully caught in Dench's resolute performance as the monarch, and it's almost worth the price of a ticket for Anthony Sher's deliciously camp turn as Disraeli.

## THE CELLULOID CLOSET

Directors: Rob Epstein & Jeffrey Friedman

Vito Russo's groundbreaking book, *The Celluloid Closet*, first appeared in 1981. It was a genuinely shocking account of how the movies, and Hollywood in particular, had manipulated and consistently misrepresented images of gays and lesbians on the screen. As a film itself, it's the most recent project from the team who produced the Academy Award-winning *The Times of Harvey Milk* and that fine documentary about the AIDS quilt project, *Common Threads*.

*The Celluloid Closet* has two components: a lively selection of film clips from over the past 70 or so years along with interviews with various celebrities either involved in them or affected by them. It's in the interviews that the political thrust of the film lies, whether it be Shirley MacLaine talking about how they filmed *The Loudest Whisper* back in 1962 without even mentioning the word lesbian, or writer Armistead Maupin

remembering what a bleak model the gay bar scene from Otto Preminger's *Advise and Consent* put before him as a young man.

The bonus is that the film clips are in prime condition, so that Sam Leavitt's gorgeous black-and-white Panavision images in *Advise and Consent* positively gleam; no video scavenging and third generation clips here.

Nor is there any PC mould lingering in *The Celluloid Closet*. Playwright Harvey Fierstein is allowed to stand up for the right to be a 'sissy', while comments from Jay Preston Allen and Mart Crowley are remarkably clear-eyed and honest. The only regret is that so much must lie on the cutting room floor — certainly Arthur Laurents, in print, has shown that there is still a lot to be uncovered and discussed...

## WHEN WE WERE KINGS

Director: Leon Gast

This is a mighty film, a time capsule from 23 years ago based around the 1974 bout between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman. This so-called 'rumble in the jungle', staged in Zaire, was an extraordinary event, a tussle of the giants, combined with an international jazz, rock and blues festival. It was an eccentric play for global publicity by the despotic President Mbutu, and milked for all it was worth by Ali's manager, the outrageous Don King.

Well, they're all here on the screen, including commentators George Plimpton and Norman Mailer (who also offer hindsight in 1996 interviews) but the star is definitely the charismatic Ali. Not only stunning in the ring ('floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee' is one description proffered in the course of the film) but his irrepressible banter, lying somewhere between shaggy dog stories, jive talk and rap is fascinating. 'If you think the world was surprised when Nixon resigned/Wait till I kick Foreman's behind' is just

one of the niftier couplets. These freewheeling performances are so obviously a key part of the burgeoning black consciousness of the 1970s, that Spike Lee's dry commentary from 1996 seems unnecessary.

And there's the music too... from James Brown's ass-kickin' stage show to some emotion-drenched solos from B.B. King — performances worthy of a film in their own right.

A plea: I'm anything but an devotee of the boxing ring, and my partner would rather walk a thousand miles on cut glass than darken the hallways of a ballet theatre. Yet, just as I was caught up in the Muhammad Ali saga, so was he with the life and career of Suzanne Farrell in Anne Belle and Deborah Dickon's documentary on the American ballerina.

*Suzanne Farrell: the Elusive Music* played the Festival and has now vanished. It's a gem and doesn't deserve to disappear so unceremoniously. Unlike some documentaries which end up saying more about the director than the subject, Farrell speak (and dances) for herself here. Friends and colleagues corroborate (remiscences are often intercut between different characters) and a generous selection of film and television footage shows her superb artistry, and working with George Balanchine, her mentor and guiding force in her life.

This is the sort of eloquent tribute that any artist would be honoured to have. It happens, alas, rarely. I saw the film twice in July; once on video, and later in the cinema, where the images bloomed and our engagement with the characters was increased ten fold. It would be cheering to think that a short season could be found for it somewhere.

## TRUE LOVE AND CHAOS

Director: Stavros Endonis Efthymiou

The road movie is a rich and potentially quirky vehicle. It favours modest budgets and freewheeling invention, colourful confrontations and many young directors are understandably drawn to it. The protagonists can be anything from angry young women (*Thelma and Louise*), drag queens (*Priscilla*) to wackos-on-the-run (*Kiss and Kill*).

Trouble is inevitable in the road movie, even if *True Love and Chaos* is prefaced by a quote from *The Wizard of Oz* pleading for 'a place where there isn't trouble'. Perhaps this is the problem with Efthymiou's film is that, apart from the one character's psycho brother and a bit of smack on the side, it's a pretty uneventful trip to Perth.

*True Love and Chaos* gathers together a cluster of Oz stars — Miranda Otto (*Love Serenade*), Noah Taylor (*Shine*) and Hugo Weaving (*Priscilla*) are just three — but, touching as their lives are (Otto maniacally dancing by herself to Tom Jones in a motel room is a particular affecting image) it all makes for a curiously low-key movie.



THE UGLY

## MRS BROWN

Director: John Madden

The subject is classy — the mysterious 'relationship' between the widowed Queen Victoria and her feisty Highland servant, John Brown; the movie is shot in and around various noble homes by an efficient director best known for his stage work. And, to cap it off, it's a damn clever piece of casting, bringing together the thespian establishment (Dame Judi Dench as the queen) with that Scotsman with his finger up his nose (Billy Connolly as her kilted serving man).



WHEN WE WERE KINGS

## Reel NEWS

Pam Grier the star of blaxploitation movies such as *Foxy Brown* and *Coffy* returns in Quentin Tarantino's new movie *Jackie Brown* playing a flight attendant involved in a drug smuggling scheme. The movie also stars Samuel L. Jackson and Bridget Fonda. The movie is based on Elmore Leonard's novel *Rum Punch* ... Tom Petty plays a city mayor in *The Postman*, a futuristic action movie directed by Kevin Costner. The movie will contain a 15 minute action scene filmed "live on the net" ... Aretha Franklin will reprise her *Blues Brothers* role in *Blues*

*Brothers 2000* ... Danny DeVito directs Robert De Niro and himself in *The Little Things* about a cop duo chasing a serial killer ... Tom Cruise plays the legendary record producer Phil Spector in the upcoming biopic ... Demi Moore will star in a Woody Allen movie ... the Randy Newman score was dumped by director Wolfgang Petersen from the movie *Air Force One* eight weeks before opening day. Jerry Goldsmith (*Aliens*) was given four weeks to write a 63 minute score ... Sting provides the music for Disney animated film *The Prince and the Pauper* ...

Oprah Winfrey (*The Colour Purple*) returns to historical drama with the Jonathan Demme directed *Beloved* about post-Civil War slavery in Ohio ... *Fargo* producer Ethan Coen will publish a book of short stories in 1998 ... Stanley Kubrick movie *Eyes Wide Shut* has been shooting for over a year and scenes have now had to be reshot with Sydney Pollack substituting for Harvey Keitel who jumped ship. The next projects for Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman are on hold while Kubrick directs as many as 93 takes of one scene ... the next project for Nicole Kidman is a Noel Coward comedy *Quadrille* ... Bruce Willis is expected to get \$25 million if he is willing to do *Diehard 4*.

## NEW Releases

Aug 28 — Scott Reynolds' *The Ugly* — Paolo Rotundo, Rebecca Hobbs.  
Sept 4 — *Addicted to Love* — Meg Ryan, Matthew Broderick.  
Sept 25 — *Mrs Brown* — Billy Connolly, Judi Dench.  
Oct 2 — *George of the Jungle* — Brendan Fraser, Leslie Mann.  
Oct 2 — *Conspiracy Theory* — Mel Gibson, Julia Roberts.  
Oct 9 — *Event Horizon* — Laurence Fishburne, Sam Neill.  
Oct 23 — *Contact* — Jodie Foster, Matthew McNaughey, James Wood.  
Oct 23 — *The Sweet Hereafter* — won Cannes '97 Grand Jury Prize.  
Oct 30 — Kevin Spacey's *Albino Alligator* — Matt Dillon, Faye Dunaway.  
Nov 6 — *Airforce One* — Harrison Ford.  
Nov 20 — *The Peacemaker* — George Clooney, Nicole Kidman.  
Dec 4 — *Kull the Conqueror* — Kevin Sorbo.