

by Gurn Blasten

**S** EVEN YEARS AGO director Stephen Frears made a little seen film starring John Hurt, called *The Hit*. It was an odd, moody, and at times darkly comic tale of a hitman and his dim-witted younger partner who are ordered to kill a criminal stool piper. Although it was only his second film, his first being *Gumshoe* in 1971, Frears was already demonstrating his burgeoning talent for directing offbeat stories, with strange and complicated characters. He was to put these talents to even greater use in the following years, with such films as *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Prick Up Your Ears*, and *Sanmi and Rosie Get Laid*.

**“Without a doubt, the best movie ever made about con artists...”**

*The Grifters* is his new film and like his previous films it continues in the uncommon vein that Frears has made his own. Definitely most akin to *The Hit*, in both style and content, *The Grifters* is Frears' first true American production. With kindred spirit Martin Scorsese producing, it is obvious from the first frame their collaboration has been a most fruitful one for both directors. Frears is completely within his milieu in this traditionally American dominated genre. The three main protagonists in *The Grifters* are con artists. The old pro is played by Angelica Huston,

she runs money for the mob. Her son (John Cusack) is a master of "The Short Con", strictly a small-time hustler. Rounding out the trio is Annette Bening as Cusack's girlfriend, who sells her body and soul for "The Long Con"; schemes involving big investors and large sums of money. Entirely devoted to these three characters, the story follows their exploits as each gradually sacrifices their lives and alliances for the pursuit of "The Grift", the act and procurement of money in this always dangerous profession.

Without a doubt the best movie ever made about con artists, *(House of Games* comes a fairly close second), *The Grifters* is remarkably suited to the talents of Frears and his cast. Best Oscar nominee Angelica Huston is starring in the lead role. Her incomparable abilities are fully utilized in a demanding role that requires both a steely-hard exterior mixed with a slightly vulnerable quality, and she acquires herself superbly. Cusack and Bening are also ideally cast. They demonstrate, particularly Bening who is also nominated for her role, that these are two of the best in the younger generation working in film today.

However, it is Frears and Scorsese who deserve the real kudos for bringing this dark and entertaining film to the screen. It is a tribute to both of their talents that *The Grifters* is such an uncommonly superior example of great filmmaking, and yet another triumph in the relatively as-yet short career of Stephen Frears, a truly gifted director who continues to challenge the average filmmaker with unconventional and enlightening material.

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King of New York

**C** ULT FILMMAKER Abel Ferrara (Ms. 45) is back in great form! This time he spins a dark, ultra-violent tale of New York crimelord Christopher Walken, who murders his way to the top of the city's drug trade. Ironically, Walken's character also has a civil conscience, so he exclusively employs Black street kids, and spends his free time trying to get a hospital built for the poor. Sound interesting? This was probably the most overlooked gangster film of the fall season and it should finally get the audience it deserves on video. It is a flashy yet realistic look at the gangsters who live in luxury, and the cops who must sometimes dirty themselves to combat the ever-burgeoning drug problem in major U.S. cities.

I Come In Peace

A SCI-FI THRILLER that deftly melds the alien and cop-buddy genres. Dolph Lundgren stars as a cop who must figure out the mystery behind a seven-foot tall alien who is harvesting human victims in order to suck their brains through an unusual device in his sleeve. Unfortunately, Dolph must also contend with some pretty lame

repartee between his character and an obnoxious FBI man who is his partner on the case. Dialogue aside, however, Dolph acquires himself adequately for the spectacular action scenes that are brilliantly staged by director Craig Baxley (Action Jackson). All in all an above average movie that is a perfect rental for a slow night.

Frankenstein Unbound

AFTER NEARLY 20 years as a producer, Roger Corman has finally returned to the directors chair with an interesting little sci-fi film. Based on the book by British author Brian Aldiss, the film relates the experiences of an American scientist from the future, played by John Hurt, whose implosion experiment goes awry and thrusts him back in time to the period covered in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Here he meets Shelly (Bridget Fonda), and the "real-life" Baron Frankenstein (Raul Julia), who also has encountered disaster with his uncontrollable creation. A film about the universal dangers of science, it is both an amusing and exciting tale told with the usual Corman flourishes for violence and madness. Definitely not for all tastes, but well worth a look for sci-fi/horror fans and a must for Corman buffs.



Alex S. watch out for these lips.

emotional stress, the lawyers (even the "good" ones) tell barrels of lies, manipulate their evidence, their witnesses, the juries and the general public and only stop short of running for political office (which is what most lawyers seem to do). The justice system is made to resemble a circus and justice prevails. The good people "kick ass". Everybody else gets burned. The audience goes home full of wonder and admiration for these new crusaders, comforted by the thought that thanks to the legal profession all of society's problems will be solved.

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# SIMPLE BEAUTIES MASSIVE IRONIES

read on...

*I know a man named Vincent Van Gogh, he loved colour and he let it show.*  
—Jonathan Richmond

by Chris Lambie

**V** INCENT AND THEO is one damned beautiful piece of work. The intense clarity and power of Van Gogh's vision permeates this movie with an incense of truth and the brilliant colours of life-experience.

The film opens on a cynical note at Christie's Fine Art Auctioneers, where Van Gogh's painting of sunflowers is selling for over fifty million dollars. This advance clip of his future in the history of art is sorely juxtaposed with the grim reality of Van Gogh's poverty and low position.

Aside from his painting, the script centres on Van Gogh's relationship with his brother — Theo. A syphilitic art dealer with mountainous passions, Theo is constantly sacrificing his own needs and wants to support his brother both financially and mentally.

Vincent, played by Jim Ror, sets his character as a painter in simple prose cement by saying, in response to his brother's accusations that he dresses and acts like a common workman, "I am a workman." Indeed, Vincent's volume of production is so incredible, that he fills his brother's apartment to bursting with paintings and sketches.

**“He tells the child of a prostitute, who has relieved herself on a beach...”**

The loving exchange between Vincent and Theo is simple and direct; when Theo wants to marry a Dutch beauty, his brother laughs and tells him its impossible because not only does he have syphilis, but he is also one of the poorest men Vincent has ever met.

Paul Rhys' Theo demonstrates a remarkable desire to see his brother succeed. His sexual tensions are nothing in comparison

with his need to see Vincent established in the art world. In the course of the movie, Theo even manages to solicit Gauguin as a mentor, drinking companion and baby-sitter for his brother.

Gauguin's advice is best demonstrated in a little lesson he gives Van Gogh over one of their many hangovers: "the food is ready when you think its ready, you don't need any recipe... cooking is much like painting."

In the film, Van Gogh demonstrates the typical genius' frame of reference in regard to the inferior work his brother sells to make a living. He tells the child of a prostitute, who has relieved herself on a beach, that he will take her to Paris because there's lots more deserving paintings there to piss on.

Despite his ego, there are points in the story where Vincent suffers massive personal questions regarding his own sanity. In summary of the brilliance of his work, he scrawls "I am the Holy spirit, I am whole in spirit," on his wall in an extreme effort of self-conviction.

**...that he will take her to Paris because there's lots more deserving paintings to piss on.”**

The soulful and entirely sane fire that burns in his veins, however, is often eclipsed by Vincent's crazed antics and ludicrous lack of social skills. Some of the most humorous scenes in the movie are, in fact, at his expense. When he struggles to drink turpentine and hold it down, when he threatens Gauguin's life or when he paints faces on a harlot with his oils, it is obvious that Van Gogh's life will not be an extensively long or pleasant one.

In the end, Vincent Van Gogh's passion for self-destruction costs him his life. The bonds between brothers tear so sweetly at Theo, that he dies six months later within the confines of an insane asylum.

The message in the story, however, is not one of historical facts. It is more of the living, tactile and supermorphic way in which the Van Gogh brothers interacted with the simple beauties and massive ironies of their environment to create a new truth in art.



# MIRIAM!

by Jerry West

**A** REMODELED church on the corner of North Sreet and Fuller Terrace seemed to be the perfect venue for Miriam's music. As we walked in the door there were stacks of chairs on the left, and the woman that took our money invited us to sit anywhere.

Forty or fifty people were arranged on chairs across the hardwood floor, facing the wall of wood paneling that houses the pipes for the church organ. On the stage in front of the paneling a woman in a plaid dress and hiking boots played the guitar with a natural ease. An aura of bubbling sincerity oozed from her presence like bubble bath in a rain storm.

Miriam's songs were easily accessible, with familiar folk topics like the environment, politics and personal relationships. Her original lyrics were insightful and straightforward. Between songs she showed a decided lack of "stage personality". Instead she maintained a genuine dialogue with the audience that was sometimes awkward in its ad-libs, but always endearing for its sincerity.

It seemed that everyone felt as comfortable as I did. At one point Miriam threw off her belt in a mock strip-tease. A young man who looked as if he would normally work hard to avoid public attention, proceeded to walk up to the stage and carried the prize back to his seat amid much applause.

After the show we had the opportunity to talk to Miriam. Chris Lambie immediately asked her how long she could hold her breath. Unfazed, she challenged him to a competition on the spot. Luckily good sense prevailed and we put the contest off until after the interview.

**Gaz: You come from Boston. How did you end up in Nova Scotia?**

Miriam: Two years ago I met some people from here in Vermont and

invited me for a visit. I've been here off-and-on since then, but I'm going back to Boston in May to play with a band I've started there. **You deal with a lot of political issues in your music, like acid rain, and the carving up of the planet by borders. Do politics play a major role in your life?**

Well, my politics revolve around current issues and people. The stage is such a great forum, I think I just want to change the way people think about some things, break down some stereotypes.

**Like?**

Well, like the myth that all women in dresses shave their legs. I don't deal with everything through my music, I've recently discovered I can present a message in the way I act and the things I say on stage.

**During your performance you talked about sexuality and safe-sex issues.**

Yes, the nineties are supposed to be the age of sexual awareness, but people are still ignorant of safe-sex practises like dental dams and condoms. Also, entire sections of the population are supposed to remain invisible because of their sexuality. It shouldn't matter anymore.

**So do you think that your music will make a difference?**

Well, music is a great forum because it means so much to so many people. A lot of people like Billy Bragg are putting messages with their music, and it is working. The only reason that politicians are addressing earth issues now is that they are trying to appease public outcry. As far as my music is concerned, I have a very diverse audience, but all I can do is present my material and hope somebody gets something out of it.

Miriam was dragged away by concert organisers to attend to business. Fortunately the breath-holding debacle never took place.

# CLASS ACTION KICKS ASS

by Paul Webster

**I** ALWAYS WONDERED what the genesis of the phrase "kick ass" was. I found out when I went to see *Class Action* the other night. It's a legal term! Or at least a term which lawyers (and Presidents on their way to war) like to use a lot.

*Class Action* taught me a lot about the legal profession. The film tells the story of a father and daughter. They are caught on opposing sides of a class action suit being held against a mythical

American automobile maker by victims of one of its more lethally flawed products. They must sort out a rather oedipally distorted relationship while also ensuring that justice, and the small people, prevail against the monolith. Within these basic archetypes of social conflict (father-daughter, small people-big people, rich-poor) we also see something that most of us are quite unfamiliar with: the struggle of good lawyers against bad lawyers, presumably an evedrama in the courts of North America. Gene Hackman plays the good

lawyer. He is a bit of a philanderer, extremely charismatic, eloquent, a veteran civil-liberties advocate and a solid member of the Volvo-driving middle-american liberal bourgeoisie. He is also an egomaniac. Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio plays his daughter, the bad lawyer. She is ambitious, works for a corporate firm and wants a partnership. She's sleeping with a partner, (is this a phrase among lawyers?) and determined to "kick [her father's] ass". She is also an egomaniac. The story goes from confrontation to confrontation. People die of