

same heavy, moralized sentiment as those typical cornfed-boy-and-his-dog stories. The story of a boy and his horse, *The Basketball Diaries* stars young whiz, Leonardo DiCaprio, whose more-than-passing resemblance to Carroll should ensure those mawkish, Leonardo DiCaprio is Jim Carroll-style blurbs. The main problem with the youthful DiCaprio is he's less believable as Carroll the dead-end kid, than Carroll the lovable rogue Catholic boy, and the crux of this movie is those drug-addled days on the street. Sure, DiCaprio shines in the movie's set pieces - let's call 'em the Oscar clips - the harrowing coming clean, cold turkey scene, and Carroll's pathetic homecoming - "Mom, I'm in trouble. Could I have, uh, five, uh, uh...20 bucks?" - but he flounders around the rest of what seems to be a rather long film. Admittedly, however, *The Basketball Diaries*, which turns the book's liquid prose into some fine, lyrical filmmaking by director Scott Kalvert, seems like a long film because it deals with some pretty uncomfortable subject matter: heroin abuse, life on the streets, the sex trade and long, uninterrupted voiceovers of Carroll's poetry. The film's dotting reliance on Carroll's poems, mincing high school homilies that are exceptional only because, unlike every other aspiring student poetry, they didn't get torched or buried in a backyard somewhere in a sensible act to ensure that they never see the light of day, is also its greatest pressure reliever. Just when the action on the screen gets too much to handle, some bad beatnik poetry will come to help turn that frown upside-down. Yet, grim poetry aside, the film succeeds, but not for the obvious reasons. Carroll's cameo really brings home why *The Basketball Diaries* and Jim Carroll - poet, playwright, author, musician - have endured the tests of time. In a throwaway scene, Carroll appears, riffing at DiCaprio about a recent church-going, paralleling the procession to the altar with cooking up a fix. "I love a ritual," he concludes. It's funny, it's real, it's sad. It's Carroll at his best, and his world-weary presence only serves to undo the film's "bright" ending. Leaving a clean DiCaprio on stage receiving applause after a spoken word performance is not the ending of Carroll's story, nor is it really a good ending for this film. But it's the only ending that would play in Hollywood, it would seem.

-Christopher Waters



Eclipse

The great AIDS-era banality - that you sleep with every person your partner has ever slept with - may

have been the impetus for Jeremy Podeswa's first feature, *Eclipse*, whose series of interlocking vignettes comprise the film's unusual narrative structure. It is the everydayness of the characters and their narratives that ultimately appeals, however; the film

lovers experiences some form of miscommunication, deception, betrayal or emptiness. We learn that the word, "eclipse," derives from the Greek for "abandonment"; more precisely, it means to leave, or even to fail to appear - but all of these senses un-



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is anything but banal. The ten characters engage in a chain of ten couplings, in which one participant carries over from one liaison to the next, until the last wakes up with the first, closing the circle - a highly formal structure borrowed (intentionally or not) from Arthur Schnitzler's late 19th Century play *La Ronde*, or from its 1930s cinematic version by Max Ophuls.

But derivative *Eclipse* is not, linking the erotic daisy-chain to the sun's total eclipse at the end of the film, an event whose metaphorical significance quietly permeates the human pairings that precede it. According to the video-within-the-film that links the different scenes, the total eclipse was imbued in premodernity with an irreducible duality: it is both the sexual "coupling" of the sun and moon and the annihilation of the sun by the moon. These two interpretations are intertwined in the film, where each pair of

derscore the paradoxical nature of the intensely intimate physical encounter in which one participant is present in body only.

In a film obsessed with sex, the shadow of AIDS looms, but never in a didactic or obvious manner: a young male prostitute makes the condom part of "procedure"; an AIDS-awareness poster hangs half out of focus behind two adult ESL students about to have sex in mutual linguistic incomprehension; a gay teenager asserts his sexual "responsibility," prior to sleeping with an older man in a hotel room tryst, only to find, in the next vignette, that he has neglected to take the same care with his emotions. Despite the omens of AIDS, it is the heart and not the body that is the most susceptible, in love's occlusion by desire.

-Russ Kilbourn

HYPE!
(DIR. DOUG PRAY)

Hype! is Doug Pray's exploration of how Seattle, as a scene, was sold to the world, and it's a good documentary, especially considering its subject matter — the absurd amount of ink spilled over Seattle, post Nirvana, Soundgarden and Alice In Chains — and manages to paint a complete portrait of Seattle as a community of musicians, artists and writers who come together because, in the freezing cold and desolate North West, there wasn't much else to do. *Hype!* succeeds best at portraying the strength of Seattle's music scene before gaining international infamy — the evolution of band after band, and sound after sound that existed before anyone noticed, and has continued now that no one cares any longer. (One of the best lines in the movie comes from Screaming Trees bassist Van Conner: "People say there are tons of bands in Seattle. The Screaming Trees are a ton of band.") Talks include an articulate Eddie Vedder, Sub Pop founders Jonathan Poneman and Bruce Pavitt, producers Jack Endino (whose interview provides the film's narrative thread), Steve Fisk and K Records guru Calvin Johnson, as well as a slew of bands. *Hype!* is well made, and occasionally very funny, but lacks the insight to go beyond itself, to go beyond what made the documentary itself possible — that we're all sick of hearing about Seattle.

-James Keast

BREAKING THE WAVES
(DIR. LARS VON TRIER)

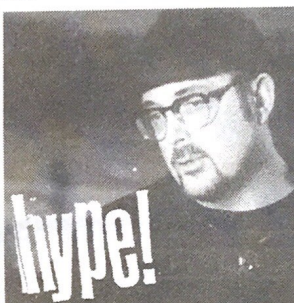
Breaking the Waves, the latest from idiosyncratic Danish director Lars Von Trier (*Europa, The Kingdom*) is an unabashedly melodramatic story of true love, simple faith and, in the end, a vision of transcendence so close to outright kitsch that you have to admire Von Trier's sheer gall — not to mention his adherence to a Catholic emphasis on the possibility of the miraculous in *this* world. Set in a remote, strictly Calvinist community in early 1970s Scotland, *Breaking the Waves* recounts the intensely happy but tragically shortened marriage of Bess MacNeil, an innocent and pious product of this close-knit world who somehow manages to fall for an "outsider": Jan, an offshore oil rig worker. Unable to cope with the separations entailed by Jan's profession, Bess prays to God for guidance, even providing God's side of the exchange. Like the Fisherman's Wife in the old fairy tale who was granted a wish, asked for too much, and wound up with nothing, Bess in her colloquies with God is offered her heart's desire, which she learns only too late must be gained at enormous cost, at first to others but, inevitably and most terribly, to herself. In her acceptance of this sacrificial role, Bess achieves a quality of contemporary saintliness beyond the comprehension of most of the townsfolk, who shun her as a result. As in all his films, Von Trier's style in *Breaking the Waves* is experimental and challenging: the edgy, handheld camera imparts a docu-realist touch, in turn repeatedly undercut by digitally-enhanced, colour-saturated "chapter headings," and finally by the closing shot itself, the outright audacity of which

(the metaphysical is made physical) pushes the film beyond the postmodern into a category for which there is no name but "Von Trier."

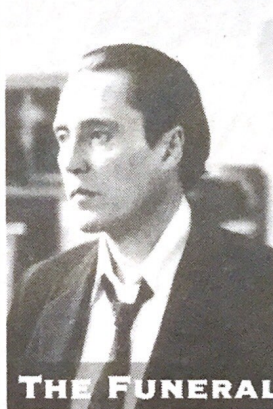
-Russ Kilbourn

THE ENGLISH PATIENT
(DIR. ANTHONY MINGHELLA)

You can't resist comparing Anthony Minghella's cinematic adaptation of *The English Patient* to the Michael Ondaatje novel that is its source. As always, it is a question of exclusion, and in this case the film's omissions result in a more straightforward, but still very satisfying narrative structured around the relationship between Almásy and Katherine (the equally beautiful Ralph Fiennes and Kristin Scott



Thomas) in the burning North African sands of the Patient's memory. The present tense relationship between Hana and Kip (Juliette Binoche and Naveen Andrews) becomes secondary, providing emotional and aesthetic contrast as the narrative point-of-view moves fluidly back and forth in time. Minghella succeeds admirably in translating Ondaatje's profound sensitivity to the convergence of memory and love in narrative. Breathtaking cinematography maps the contiguous topographies of desert and lover's body, in the mysterious cartography of memory; passages of historical narrative are obscured by pasted-in souvenirs; ancient fables are appropriated as allegories of desire and betrayal. Still, Minghella's version imparts a concreteness to past events that the novel's subtler prose evades. The necessary re-



ordering of events in the film shifts the emotional weight entirely (and successfully) onto Almásy and Katherine's past affair. "In memory, love lives for ever," the film's ad reads, and it is precisely in this sense that love is stronger than death. But the Patient, divested of identity and already dead, finally has only memory, which nothing — neither love nor death — can outlive.

-Russ Kilbourn

FREEWAY

(DIR. MATTHEW BRIGHT)

That *Freeway*, Matthew Bright's debut, is a satirical reworking of Little Red Riding Hood, is revealed during the opening credits, which appear over a soft-porn comic strip version of the story. But along the way *Freeway* picks up other, more cinematic myths (feminist revenge fantasy, juvenile delinquent redemption drama, etc.) and doesn't let them go until they've been thoroughly manhandled. Sixteen-year-old Vanessa Lutz (Reese Witherspoon), barely literate, nevertheless out-argues, out-swears, or out-guns the uncaring or abusive adults she encounters along the journey to the supposed haven of Grandma's trailerpark. When all else fails, she turns psycho-violent and gives back as good as she's gotten, particularly in her run-in with Big Bad Bob Wolverton (Kiefer Sutherland, who never resembled his father so much as when he is covered in blood and pleading), child psychologist moonlighting as freeway serial killer. Despite its relentlessly satirical tone, Bright's twisted fairy tale empowers its plucky heroine by vindicating her darkest and most violent urges. Is this a happy ending?

-Russ Kilbourn