

## THE GENERAL

(DIR. JOHN BOORMAN)

For fans of the gritty underbelly of the Celtic invasion comes *The General*, a small but very well-made new film from veteran John Boorman (*Deliverance*, *Hope and Glory*). Set in the mean streets of contemporary



Dublin, *The General* is a fictional account of the life and career of Martin Cahill, Ireland's most notorious gangster — the Irish Republic's enemy number one from the early '80s to the mid-'90s. The film begins at the end: Cahill's assassination — most likely the work of the IRA — and then unfolds in gorgeous black-and-white flashback. Growing up in the dead-end working-class slum of 1960s Hollyfield, young Martin (Eamon Owens) develops an all-embracing contempt for police, church, and state that would broaden to include even the IRA and Protestant terrorists. Cahill defies any and all forms of authority, becoming a law unto himself as he and his gang pull off some of the century's most ingenious and spectacular heists (apparently netting approximately \$60 million), while making a laughing stock of both police and less-imaginative criminals.

Cahill develops into "the general," a sort of latter-day Robin Hood with a nasty propensity for Piranha Brothers-style depredations (at one point, he nails a suspected traitor to a snooker table). Brilliantly portrayed by Brendan Gleeson (Mel Gibson's sidekick in *Braveheart*), what makes the character of Cahill so captivating is not just his exuberance, but his outright rejection of social advancement or respectability,

his refusal to transcend his own class, even with the means to do so. Boorman and Gleeson succeed utterly in bringing to life Cahill's unique and potent mix of violence, humour and generosity, which made him a true legend in his own lifetime, a legend that has apparently only grown since his death in 1994, and which, with the release of *The General*, stands to grow even more.

-Russ Kilbourn

## OFFICE SPACE

(DIR. MIKE JUDGE)

Is there anything more reliable than workplace humour? Mike Judge, creator of *Beavis and Butthead* and *King of the Hill*, didn't think so. His live-action debut, *Office Space*, presents another harried Everyman: Peter Gibbons (Ron Livingston), who hates his job as a Y2K programmer at Initech. Hypnotised by his girlfriend Anne's (Alexandra Wentworth) therapist, his sense of motivation flat-lines and he stops going to work. *Office Space's* greatest weakness is Jennifer Aniston, as Joanna, a disaffected waitress at the restaurant where Peter and his colleagues eat lunch. Why director Mike Judge chose Aniston over Alexandra Wentworth, who's used for only five minutes, is anyone's guess. Even more annoying is the character Samir (Ajay Naidu) who draws laughs for saying, in a vaguely Middle Eastern accent, things like "That's true," and "No kidding."

*Office Space* barely qualifies as a sitcom after the first 45 minutes, which closely observe the worst indignities of working life. The funniest moments, like John C. McGinley's efficiency expert explaining his taste for Michael Bolton, or three co-workers beating a recalcitrant fax machine as though it owed them a gambling debt, may be worth paying for, depending on your tolerance for a lousy story. I liked the film's set design best — Peter's apartment, with its curvy, stained Ikea-ware, the strip mall of good food emporia, and the low, cool Initech building, with its trees, grass and sunshine, all look like pieces of an earlier decade's dystopian prediction. Sadly, it came true.

-John Zachariah

## THE OTHER SISTER

(DIR. GARRY MARSHALL)

About ten minutes into this film I thought it was maybe the worst thing I'd ever seen from a mainstream director (in this case, *Pretty Woman* auteur Garry Marshall). Another 20 minutes later I was laughing fre-



very soul. That's the real story of *Brassed Off*. That and a strong supporting cast is why the film soars above its derivative devices and succeeds in a bout of honest storytelling.

-Christopher Waters

**LOVE! VALOUR! COMPASSION!**  
(DIR. JOE MANTELLO)

*Love! Valour! Compassion!*, the directorial debut for actor Joe Mantello (*Angels in America*), brings Terrence McNally's award-winning off-Broadway play to the screen with virtually the entire original cast. What is retained from the theatrical production is undoubtedly what is best about the film: the screenplay (also by McNally), and the acting. The talk-laden action unfolds over three separate summer weekends at a secluded Victorian country home in upper New York State. Eight gay men gather to kvetch, banter, lust, insult, cry, break down, and otherwise relax, like people on vacation everywhere. But the veneer of "universality" is deceptive. Each character tends to signify in terms of a different aspect of what might be called, in a fairly narrow conception, the contemporary gay male experience. Of the eight, a few must serve as examples: John, a snide British composer with the unfortunate sur-

name 'Jeckyll,' is, for the first half of the film, the most obnoxious, and therefore the most appealing, of the group. In the second half, however, he descends into nicotine-stained self-loathing motivated primarily by the remarkably trite desire for the much nicer others to "like" him. James, John's identical, but polar opposite twin brother (both

are impressively played by John Glover), is the generous, tittering spinster to his brother's sneering, chain-smoking misanthrope; James is also dying of AIDS. A pudgier, balder Jason Alexander (*Seinfeld*), as the flamboyant and "needy" Buzz (the single new addition to the cast), transforms gradually from a gay George Costanza into a convincing and affecting HIV-positive gay man, who comes to serve as the emotional axis of this light-heartedly serious story. Perry and Arthur (Stephen Spinella and John Benjamin Hickey), the one solidly "married" couple, are role models not only for gay monogamy but even more so for the (small 'c') conservative American middle class at its most conventional, conspicuously consuming, and petty. Although the characters are set up to represent different perspectives, their sexuality guarantees that their lives not be taken as emblematic of some generalized 'human condi-



**The Lost World: Jurassic Park**

tion.' To assert otherwise is an even more serious denigration of the above-mentioned "gay experience" — as if it were any more unitary than the heterosexual equivalent. There is much to like about *Love! Valour! Compassion!* (apart from its histrionic title), and it is at times genuinely moving. The story the film tells is certainly an old one,

conveyed in a language that is itself already oddly familiar.

-Russ Kilbourn

**THE LOST WORLD:  
JURASSIC PARK**  
(DIR. STEVEN SPIELBERG)

It's not easy to argue with success, and comments that one of the world's biggest money makers was completely lacking in character, or any semblance of a real story to tell, fell on deaf ears. Forget the apocalyptic ending of *Jurassic Park*, the fact that we all breathed a sigh of relief that the world had been saved, because as the first ten minutes of *The Lost World* demonstrate, there's nothing that movie land can't explain for another bazillion dollars. The explanation is shaky, but that's ok. That's not what we're here for, and as soon as we head off to the island where, it turns out, the original park dinosaurs were bred, and have now formed an ecosystem on their own, it's "show me the dinosaurs." For \$120 million, I want to see some groovy effects, and *The Lost World* has truckloads. There are a couple more species, it turns out, on this island, but the crowd-pleasers, T-Rex and the Raptors are back in full force. So is Jeff Goldblum as Dr. Ian Malcolm, chaos theorist; Julianne Moore and Pete Postlethwaite are also along for the ride, but they, along with plot and consistency, are irrelevant. *The Lost World* gives patrons what they want — two full hours of computer-generated gore and thrills. Spielberg does these better than anyone, but unless you're willing to suspend your disbelief at the door (along with your brain), you're better off investing in an air-conditioner and renting.

-James Keast



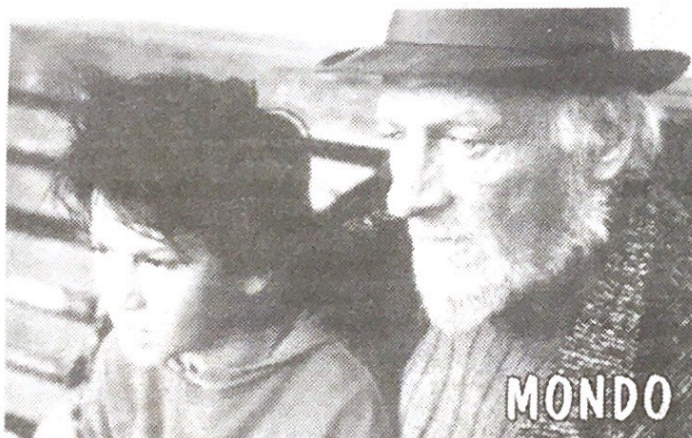
law going through the DT's, while confronting the threats of his son's former associates, a pair of thugs determined to recoup the booty from the heist that landed his son in jail. The Joe Lunchbox who rises to the occasion under impossible duress, wisecracking all the while, is a familiar Hollywood narrative trope — the release of the superhero within. But Nunez underplays the suspense and action of *Ulee's Gold*, drawing as much dramatic impact out of lengthy sequences detailing Ulee's daily labours producing honey, and for Ulee, appeasing the hoods and keeping his family safe are yet more labours stoically performed. Like Nunez's previous film, *Ruby In Paradise*, which also took place in his beloved Florida, *Ulee's Gold* is a small, occasionally beautiful film that happily eschews spectacle and overstimulation for a stark depiction of how character is shaped by the quotidian.

-Chris Wodskou

**MONDO**  
(DIR. TONY GATLIF)

Although based on a story by French writer J.M.G. Le Clezio, *Mondo* is a true cinematic poem. Written and directed by Algerian Gypsy Tony Gatlif (*Latcho Drom*), *Mondo* maintains what Gatlif calls his epony-

mous protagonist's "dimension of mystery": "No one knew where Mondo came from," an unknown child's voice-over tells us at the beginning. Showing up one day in Nice, with neither family, possessions or money, "Mondo" is the ten-year-old Gypsy boy (real Romanian Gypsy Ovidiu Balan) who quietly but deeply enriches the lives of the people



he meets to an extent only surpassed by the degree to which they are impoverished when he suddenly vanishes, like he arrived, without warning. *Mondo's* lyrical, quasi-neo-realist style is punctuated with moment after moment of cinematic magic: tethered boats bobbing in Nice's sunlight harbor; a flotilla of oranges arriving by sea, their skins covered in Arabic script; a baby laughing at a street magician's card trick; a benevolent hobo with a suitcase full of doves (real homeless

Scotsman Jerry Smith); a Kurdish woman singing from her window; a French woman singing in a church; the letters of the alphabet etched onto stones; the face of a child sleeping in a garden. It is oddly appropriate that "Mondo" also means "world," for were this an ideal one, everyone would go to see *Mondo*; unfortunately, as Le Clezio laments,

"today's public is not prepared to receive films like this." On the other hand, in an ideal world, there would be no need for films like *Mondo*, which, like its hero, imagines a world all the more beautiful for its imperfections.

-Russ Kilbourn

**THE VAN**  
(DIR. STEPHEN FREARS)

The Roddy Doyle/Stephen Frears/Colm Meaney combination worked a good deal of magic in *The Snapper*, but

much of *The Van* merely seems like work, labouring to get the broadest, cheapest laugh out of the shenanigans of Meaney and his mates. Based on Doyle's novel of the same name, *The Van* is the third installment of the so-called Barrytown trilogy of Doyle's novels (*The Commitments* and *The Snapper* being the others) taking place in a boisterous enclave of North Dublin, but the effect of the cheerfully vulgar poetry of Doyle's dia-

## SHE'S SO LOVELY

(DIR. NICK CASSAVETES)

Go to see *She's So Lovely*, the latest offering from Nick Cassavetes, but leave after the first half. From a screenplay left behind by his late father, *She's So Lovely* is divided into two parts more or less equal in length but so divergent in style and quality they look like they were joined together by mistake. The first is a funny, affecting inner-city fable about Maureen and Eddie, two young, attractive, crazy-in-love drunks who live in a flea-bag hotel and spend their time drinking cheap booze they can't afford, dancing, falling down, brawling — and having a lot of fun. Sean Penn, as Eddie, gets all the best lines and is as mesmerizing as ever, winding up a sort of pathetic Chaplinesque psycho at the end of the first half. And the chemistry is definitely there with Maureen, played by Penn's real-life wife, Robin Wright (*Forrest Gump*), until, by sheer force of love, Eddie goes off the deep end. An unlikely story, perhaps, but these initial sequences, dark and seedy but warmly lit (marred only by some gratuitous slo-mo bits), hold together as a narrative of hopeless passion, and demonstrate what Cassavetes *films* is capable of.

The sunny second half, with its psycho at the hair salon, downtown hoods in the suburbs, 9 year olds drinking beer, and random gunfire, is more like something by the late Quentin you-know-who than Cassavetes *père*. John Travolta just looks unhappy. But Penn looks absolutely at sea, emerging from ten years in the loony bin to find his good-time gal transformed into a June Cleaver under the influence. It's as though the second half of *She's So Lovely* were a metaphor for the aftermath of Eddie's mental breakdown: the whole world is changed, nothing makes any sense anymore, so you might as well just smile and head straight back to the bar.

-Russ Kilbourn

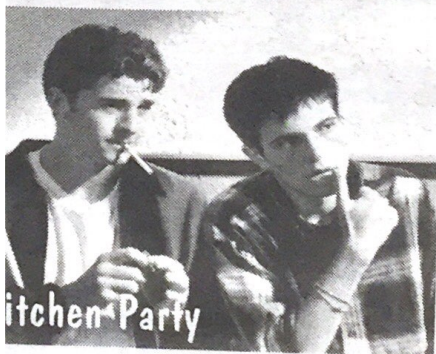


erished mother of four, who is pushed into theft first as a desperate means of providing for her children. Soon, however, she turns to kleptomania as vengeance against her no-account husband and to vent her rage against a social order that neither understands her plight, nor makes it any easier for her to raise her family. Even if the conclusion is a mess—it looks as though Barker handed over the last ten minutes to an intern to finish—it's a highly entertaining ride, like a rollicking Ken Loach. -CW

#### KITCHEN PARTY

(DIR. GARY BURNS)

Following the critical success of *The Suburbanators*, Calgary director Burns re-directs his sights to the obsessions and foibles of life in a more exclusive realm of suburbia. While his authoritarian, social-climbing parents are away getting liquored up at a dinner party, Scott, on the eve of his departure for university, seizes the chance to have a party, but one completely confined to the kitchen so his parents never find out. Burns derives his laughs from a talented, very believable cast and wry observations about the social hierarchies and nuances of communication of teen life, never reducing his characters to wisecracks or catch phrases, creating a rarity: a teen comedy for grown-ups. -CW



#### LOVE GOD

(DIR. FRANK GROW)

A film of surpassing silliness, *Love God* throws about a half-dozen intriguing ideas into a Cuisinart and spews them out in high trash style, as if directed by a latter-day Ed Wood reared on Japanese ultra-cheese monster flicks, computer animation and music videos. Indeed, with a 43-song soundtrack, it does feel at times like a glorified rock video with an editing style tailored to sufferers of attention deficit disorder, but even if it does run counter to the film's aesthetic, I'd actually like to see it do more with its conceits of obsessive hygiene, a Bible-thumper victim of Tourette's Syndrome and the socially debilitating effects of Compulsive Reading Syndrome. -CW

#### MARQUISE

(DIR. VÉRA BELMONT)

*Marquise*, a lavish costume drama set in the France of Louis XIV, tells the story of the title character's rise to precarious fame as a tragedienne at a time when a woman's means

for social advancement were restricted to different modes of dissembling, like acting and sex. As the question of the social function of received theatrical genres cooks in the crucible of political expediency, drama's reevaluation is reflected in a clever meta-theatricality: Molière and Racine wage a war of words and intrigue over the question of the pre-eminent form — comedy or tragedy — and over the body and/or heart of the beautiful dancer Marquise (Sophie Marceau). Regrettably, in the end, wit and pathos both lose out to maudlin histrionics. -RK

#### MA VIE EN ROSE

(DIR. ALAIN BERLINER)

French directors have an uncanny talent for getting subtle, dignified performances out of child actors without resorting to Hollywood's demands that kids be cute and cloying, and first-time director Berliner gets a gem out of this portrayal of Ludo, a seven-year-old boy who's convinced that some cosmic genetic error has short-changed him of the second X chromosome he needs to be a girl. A very diverting blend of lavishly frothy fantasy sequences and social commentary on the stifling suburban regime of respectability that outcasts Ludo and his family for his persistent cross-dressing. -CW

#### PITCH

(DIRS. KENNY HOTZ AND SPENCER RICE)

This goofy twosome managed to create their own hype by annoying and haranguing everyone at last year's festival while filming this autobiographical documentary. *Pitch* follows Kenny and Spenny's attempts to sell their dumb idea for a script, called *The Dawn*. *The Dawn* is about a mob don who accidentally gets a sex change, and then learns all about life as a woman. From the hilarious chalk-board wish list of stars ("Al Pacino would be perfect!") to chasing down any celeb that would listen, *Pitch* makes for an entertaining and informative look into either the enthusiastic joy of rugged documentary, or the absurd narcissism of writing a movie, wanting to sell it, then making a movie about selling it. *The Dawn* might suck, if it ever gets made, but *Pitch* doesn't. -JK

#### SICK: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF BOB FLANAGAN, SUPERMASOCHIST

(DIR. KIRBY DICK)

Bob Flanagan's entrée into something approaching mass culture came through adorning the cover of *Re/Search* and serving as the human pin cushion in Nine Inch Nails' "Happiness in Slavery" video, neither of which fostered much understanding of what compelled him to so doggedly explore and pursue the mortification of the flesh to its limits. This documentary does. It doesn't sensationalise his lifestyle or sexuality for the modern primitive generation, but allows Flanagan, who died last year of the cystic fibrosis that wracked his body his entire life, to explain himself with his warmth, wit, intelligence and charisma, as well as anger at the body whose boundaries he pushed and which ultimately failed him. -CW