

# Caravaggio

Review by Lois Wadsworth

*British avant-garde filmmaker Derek Jarman freely mixes fiction and the few known facts about this controversial painter of the Italian Renaissance to create a stunning, unconventional biographical film.*

The life story of Michaelangelo Merisi of Caravaggio unfolds as he lies dying in Tuscany in 1610. Derek Jarman tells Caravaggio's story on at least three levels—life on the fringe of 17th Century Italian society; the delirious fantasies, dreams, and poetic musings of a dying man; and contemporary images and dialogue (in slang English!) that show that life on the streets hasn't changed all that much in a few centuries.

Apparently, Michaelangelo was apprenticed to a painter as a child. How Jarman portrays even this early bit of the man's history is instructive. We see a man, wearing a hat, seated at a table across from an old woman. He gives her coins. In the background, a silent, weeping woman stands. A child, a young boy, plays about the room. The grandmother speaks to the child, who is looking out the window at the night sky. "The stars are the diamonds of the poor," she says. The man carries the boy away on his shoulders. Later in the studio, the child plays with a shield bearing the head of the Medusa; the man holds him as he slips into sleep. In subsequent scenes, we recognize the man in the hat as Caravaggio. Is this scene a fantasy-recollection, a dream of the dying man? Or Jarman's comment on art as both father and child to the spirit?

Interwoven with scenes of Caravaggio's dying and being taken care of by his dumb friend Jerusalem, are scenes from the artist's life. As an adolescent, he is street-wise and impudently self-assured, greatly prized for his beauty, but fiercely independent and prone to violence. His salvation from poverty lies in the attentions of a cardinal who promotes his art, not entirely from altruistic motives.

Assured of selling his religious works through his patron, Caravaggio becomes involved with both a crude gambler and fighter, Ranuccio Thomasoni, and his prostitute lover Lena. He uses them and other thieves and pimps as models for his paintings. Caravaggio loves the beautiful Lena; when she is found drowned in the Tiber, he brings her to his studio, combs out her hair, and paints her in "The Death of the Virgin."

Working with few facts, Jarman uses Caravaggio's paintings as tableaux which come alive and sweep us up in the undercurrent of brutality, integrity, and tenderness which comprise the artist's life. Gabriel Beristain captures Caravaggio's chiaroscuro lighting with cinematic precision, awakening a sense of *deja vu* in the viewer. With the help of Beristain and production designer Christopher Hobbs, Derek Jarman has created a film that juxtaposes images of surpassing beauty with scenes of nitty-gritty realism.

The acting is flawless, particularly that of the principals. Nigel Terry embodies the intense intelligence of the brilliant painter whose singleminded dedication to his vision of life and art is always threatening to erupt into anarchy and violence. Tilda Swinton gives an exquisite performance as the prostitute who is both his radiant lover and the model for his sublime portrait of "The Repentant Magdalen." Sean Bean is the sleazy Ranuccio, and Michael Gough is properly pontifical as the redoubtable Cardinal Del Monte.

What I liked best about this rather strange, haunting film, is that I could not predict what would happen next. It affected me the way Fellini films did 20 years ago. Seven years in the making testifies to Derek Jarman's perseverance and his belief in the picture. With so many formulaic movies on the circuit these days, *Caravaggio* is an exceptionally original film idea executed with intellect and humor.



"Gabriel Beristain captures Caravaggio's chiaroscuro lighting with cinematic precision, awakening a sense of *deja vu* in the viewer."

## now showing

**Angel Heart:** A private eye's search for a missing singer leads to strange encounters in Louisiana and New York. Mickey Rourke and Robert DeNiro star in this 1950-ish drama. Cinema World (342-6536).

**Burglar:** Whoopi Goldberg plays a woman with a double life—bookstore owner/master thief—who gets framed for murder while on a "job." Cinema World (342-6536).

**Caravaggio:** The imagined life of the Italian Renaissance painter, told as flashbacks from Caravaggio's deathbed. Director Derek Jarman's paradoxical film style is much influenced by the artist's own paintings. Shows 3/20-4/2 at Cinema 7 (687-0733).

**Crimes of the Heart:** Dramatic comedy. Three sisters reunite and consider their various notorious lives. Stars Oscar winners Diane Keaton, Sissy Spacek, and Jessica Lange. Shows with **From the Hip** at Fine Arts (747-2201).

**Crocodile Dundee:** A celebrated Aussie adventurer, naive to city ways, is still spending time in the Big Apple. Oakway (342-5351).

**Death Before Dishonor:** Arab terrorists kill oh-so-many innocents that a single super-marine is called in to do the same to them. West 11th (342-4142).

**From the Hip:** Comedy. A young lawyer's unruly, but winning, tactics are challenged by a tough case and disapproving superiors. Stars Judd Nelson (*St. Elmo's Fire*). Shows with **Crimes of the Heart** at Fine Arts (747-2201).

**Hoosiers:** A "washed up" basketball coach tries for a comeback as head of a small high school team. Stars Gene Hackman and Barbara Hershey. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Lady and the Tramp:** Love among the dogs is the subject of this Disney re-issue, ready for the latest generation of humans. Shows with **Song of the South**. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Lethal Weapon:** Too tough L.A. cops crack down on an international drug ring. Stars Hulk Mel Gibson and Danny Glover. McDonald (344-4343).

**Mannequin:** Can a handsome young actor find true romance with a department store dummy? Andrew McCarthy finds out. West 11th (342-4142).

**Miss Mary:** A strict English governess takes a position with a privileged Argentine family, ultimately to find an emotional conflict. Stars Julie Christie. Shows through 3/26 at Cinema 7 (687-0733).

**Nightmare on Elm St. 3—Dream Warriors:** Third in the series! Scaremonger Freddie appears through a new array of special effects. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Outrageous Fortune:** A pair of women search for their two-timing lover, who has mysteriously disappeared. Bette Midler and Shelley Long star in this cross-country comedy. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Platoon:** A day-by-day G.I. perspective of the Vietnam war. Directed by Oliver Stone (*Salvador*), who received a Purple Heart in 1967. National (344-3431).

**Radio Days:** This remembrance of scenes past reveals the effect of early radio shows upon a child's unglamorous family. Directed and narrated by an off-camera Woody Allen. Cinema World (342-6536).

**A Room with a View:** A young Englishwoman, during her proper Victorian finishing, has to choose between her dignified fiancé and an unorthodox artist. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

**Sid & Nancy:** The improbable, doomed, love story between ex-Sex Pistol Sid Vicious and groupie/junkie Nancy Spungen. Directed by Alex Cox (*Repo Man*). Bijou (686-2458).

**Some Kind of Wonderful:** A young man with an eye toward the local teen queen is blind to closer affections. Written by John Hughes. Stars Eric Stoltz (*Mask*) and Lea Thompson (*Back to the Future*). Valley River Twin (686-8633).

**Song of the South:** Re-re-release of Disney's live action/cartoon combo, featuring Uncle Remus and Co. Shows with **Lady and the Tramp** at Fine Arts (747-2201).

**Stand By Me:** A reminiscence of boyhood adventure and friendship as four youths search for a missing corpse. (Shot in Brownsville, OR.) Late show at the Bijou (686-2458).

**Star Trek IV:** More adventure for Kirk and crew. This episode brings them back to our present to help us do what we alone cannot—survive! West 11th (342-4142).

**Tin Men:** Comedy. The lives of aluminum siding salesmen, with a side of revenge becoming romance. Stars Danny DeVito, Richard Dreyfuss, and Barbara Hershey. Cinema World (342-6536).

**Witchboard:** Some kind of horror, which is all anyone seems to know about it. Springfield Quad (726-9073). —Michael on Sussman St.

**NOBLE DUCK**  
DELI & ICE CREAM

**Classic deli menu of fine food to stay or to go.**

- Business meetings catered

Mon-Fri 8:30-5:00  
1744 Willamette • 342-5539

CAFE **CENTRAL** & BAR

**FROM OUR BAKERY**

- WHOLE CAKES ■ SPECIAL ORDERS
- WEDDING CAKES ■ FRESH BREAD (75¢ LOAVES)
- SELECTED DESSERTS BY THE SLICE

384 W. 13th • 343-9510

**CINEMA 7** Attn: Bldg 687-0733

★★★—Masterful, Enchanting and Delightful! —SF Chronicle

Shows Fri & Sat, 7:30 only. Sun thru Thurs 7 pm. Sunday Bargain Matinee 4:30 pm and all shows Mon \$3.

Julie Christie is **Miss Mary**

**CINEMA 7** Attn: Bldg 687-0733

"STARKLY SENSUOUS. The breakthrough for a true maven on the British scene."

**CARAVAGGIO**  
A film by Derek Jarman

EUGENE PREMIERE—March 20 thru April 2. Shows Fri & Sat 9:30 pm. Sun thru Thurs 8:50 pm. Monday Bargain \$3. (Separate admission required.)

Derek Jarman has made a movie that in its own bold and quirky way is worthy of its subject. The spectacular, painterly camera work makes this film one of the most visually satisfying in recent years. The mood is much like that of Caravaggio's paintings—brooding, sensual, pagan in the extreme." —Edward Behr, Newsweek

**COFFEE CO.**  
ALLANN BROS.  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
SINCE 1971

**The Beanery**  
COFFEE HOUSE

Now's the time to try a breakfast at the Beanery!

HOURS: 7 am-10 pm Mon-Fri, 8 am-10 pm Sat-Sun. Breakfast served til 1:00 weekdays and til 1:30 weekends.

790 East 14th Street

**THE BIJOU** 492 E 13th 686-2458

Fri-Sat 7:15 & 9:30 • Sun-Thur 7:00 & 9:15  
Sun Barg Mat 4 pm \$3  
Gen adm \$4 / Students w/d. \$3.50  
Miser Mon \$3 / Free Popcorn Tues

**"A GREAT FILM."**  
Powerful, hilarious, frightening, entertaining. Gary Oldman is perfect!"

**"ASTONISHING."**  
Savage stylishness and sardonic comedy. Sid and Nancy holds us fascinated!"

**SID & NANCY**

**COMING SOON!**  
EUGENE PREMIERE!

**ROUND MIDNIGHT**

A NEW FILM DEDICATED TO BUD POWELL & LESTER YOUNG

**LATE NIGHT AT THE BIJOU**  
It's better on the big screen late at night!

**ONE WEEK ONLY! March 20-26**  
"Genuinely horrific and bizarrely funny. Undoubtedly the grossest movie of the year!" —David Ansen, Newsweek

Fri-Sat 11:45  
Sun-Thur 11:30  
\$2.50

**THE FLY**

STARTS MARCH 27!

**Blue Velvet**  
Directed by David Lynch  
Stars Isabelle Rossellini and Dennis Hopper

**SPRING Chocolates**

You don't have to wait for the Easter Bunny to treat yourself to our fine hand-dipped chocolates!

**Fenton & Lee**  
135 East 13th • 343-7629