

FILMS ROUNDUP

Films: Lack of direction serves film

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cally for Holly Hunter, but when a contract dispute ensued, Hunt stepped into the role.

Kinnear plays the effeminate neighbor to the neurotic Nicholson. If you're a night owl, then you may have seen Kinnear during his stint as the host of NBC's "Later," otherwise known as "The Late, Late, Late Show." You also may have caught his painful performance in the torturous attempted comedy "Dear God." Either way, when Kinnear bears his soft and sensitive side as the homosexual artist Simon Bishop in "As Good As It Gets," it is a truly breakthrough performance.

Nicholson's raspy voice suits his sardonic, outspoken, obsessive-compulsive character. And man, does he show incredible command of his facial expressions in this film. He can convey more with one eyebrow than most actors can with their whole body.

Nicholson, however, called acting in "As Good As It Gets" one of the most difficult tasks of his career because he had very little guidance from Director James L. Brooks when it came to his character. Brooks wasn't sure what the tone and feel of the film should be — even whether it should come across as a comedy or drama. He had an "I'll know what I like when I see it" attitude on the set, which at times left the actors flailing for something that worked. This situation was so unusual that Brooks comments on it through a scene in the film in which Kinnear's character refuses to give the subject of a painting any guidance on how to pose for it. The model, played by Skeet Ulrich, becomes increasingly frustrated with the artist until finally stumbling into an acceptable pose.

The lack of clear direction in "As Good As It Gets" does come through to the screen. There is an uneasiness in many of the scenes, which somehow serves the film instead of hindering it.

Amistad
This may be the finest crafted film I've ever seen. Each scene is visually stunning with impeccable style choices that enrich the story.

Just as stunning is the story of the film's star Djimon Hounsou, who went from being homeless in Paris, bathing in fountains, to being "discovered," and starring in the year's most important film. In fact, I believe that the story told in

"Amistad" carries enough weight to be included in any new edition of school history texts. Spielberg has brought to life Civil War-influencing events that somehow were swept under the rug until now.

Maybe most impressive is that Spielberg, while orchestrating "Amistad," was overseeing the creation of the next generation of "Tiny Toon Adventures." Now that is versatility.

Jackie Brown

Unlike Amistad, the choices made by Quentin Tarantino in "Jackie Brown" make the film tedious.

In watching "Pulp Fiction," viewers were captivated by the wealth of anti-action scenes: The majority of the character and plot development was driven by lengthy, casual dialogues. And in "Pulp Fiction" it works! In "Jackie Brown," however, Tarantino tries to interject similar scenes into the Elmore Leonard-written story, and it just doesn't work. The conversations aren't as interesting and feel forced into the mouths of uncomplicated characters. Tarantino's style is simply in conflict with the concrete story on which the film is based. Skip this one.

Titanic

I went into this movie wanting to hate it. I thought it was insulting that writer/director James Cameron felt he had to sugar-coat this historical event with a contrived love story starring the latest heartthrob Leonardo DiCaprio, in order to make it appealing to an American audience.

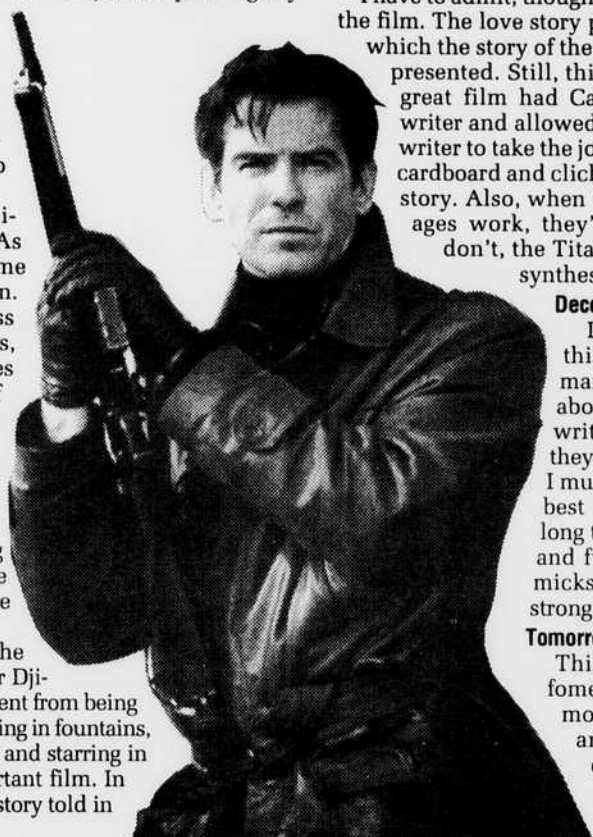
I have to admit, though, that I thoroughly enjoyed the film. The love story provided a thread through which the story of the Titanic was authentically presented. Still, this could have been a truly great film had Cameron stepped aside as writer and allowed an accomplished screenwriter to take the job. Much of the dialogue is cardboard and cliché, and it detracts from the story. Also, when the computer graphic images work, they're great, but when they don't, the Titanic looks painfully like a synthesized image.

Deconstructing Harry

I wasn't too excited to see this one, either. I mean, how many films can one watch about a disgruntled Jewish writer in Manhattan before they all start blending together? I must say, however, this is the best film Woody's made in a long time. The dialogue is fresh and funny, and the film's gimmicks work well. It also has a strong, extensive cast.

Tomorrow Never Dies

This film is a two-hour infomercial for BMW and little more. It's a shame car chases and big explosions have completely replaced the cunning and dry British wit of the Bond of old.



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