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FILMS**GET BRUCE!**
Bruce Vilanch

With his curly blond mop of hair, brightly colored glasses, portly physique and catty jokes, Bruce Vilanch is a living, breathing, talking Muppet. Best known to television audiences as the outrageous gay guy on *Hollywood Squares*—a sort of contemporary Paul Lynde—Vilanch is better known behind the scenes in Tinseltown as the man who makes the funniest comedians even funnier. When they need a joke Hollywood insiders shout, "Get Bruce!"

That's also the title of a newly released video documentary chronicling the career and quips of Vilanch. *Get Bruce!* takes viewers on a whirlwind backstage tour to examine how a nice Jewish boy went from performing on the stage in college to writing for the *Chicago Tribune* to his current role as muse to the stars.

Although his credits include such memorable jobs as head writer for *The Brady Bunch Variety Hour* and *The Donny & Marie Show* (agonizingly awful clips are included), Vilanch's work on the Academy Awards, the Emmy Awards and the Tonys is given more footage.

Extensive interviews with Whoopi Goldberg, Billy Crystal, Robin Williams and Bette Midler show how necessary Vilanch the writer is to each performer's stage presence. In the video, we get to see Goldberg and Vilanch take a critical drubbing for the ill-fated 1993 Ted Danson blackface tribute at a Friar's Club roast; hear the lyrics and jokes that censors wouldn't let Crystal use on the Oscar telecasts; and watch Robin Williams repeatedly talk about his penis...again. We also get to hear how and why Vilanch turned down a job with diva Barbra Streisand and watch the man himself at work doing standup for a host of AIDS benefits.

My complaints about the film are that not enough time

is spent detailing the effect of Vilanch's gay identity on his work, and that any other openly gay performers, except Nathan Lane, are glaringly absent from the film. Also annoying is the fact that almost no one is ever identified on-screen. Even a jaded veteran Hollywood writer like myself (no, not really jaded) kept asking "Who's that?" when some lesser star came on to laud Vilanch's talents.

Overall, *Get Bruce!* is an amusing look at a very untraditional humorist. Bruce Vilanch shows humor and heart in his work and keeps his own distinct voice even as he helps other comedians develop their personas. Maybe this live-action Muppet can really be considered a puppeteer?
—Andy Mangels

ALEGRIA
Frank Langella

The phantasmagorical phenomenon that is Cirque du Soleil is coming to Portland on May 11, but if you can't wait until then, the troupe's first feature film, *Alegria*, is now out on video. Unlike *Salimbanco*—the show that's coming our way and has been featured on PBS—this film combines a narrative love story with the on- and offstage action of the circus.

This is not your father's circus, with elephants and 30 clowns oozing out of a kiddie car. And this movie is not for young kids. It's a very dark story with many disturbing scenes of child slavery and abuse. The surreal film contrasts a bleak urban world of enforced labor, where captive

Films trip

Just Out reviews
two films just
released on video

urchins sell flowers on the streets of a depressing metropolis, with the wildly colorful and exotic illusory world of the circus.

As in every circus story ever told, someone will be inspired to run away and join up. In this case it's Franc, a mysterious street person who already wears a clown's whiteface, though he insists it's really stardust. His sidekick is Momo, a young boy desperate to escape his nightmarish life. So desperate that he tries to join Franc in committing suicide. They are both saved by the beautiful star of the circus, Julietta. A classic romance ensues, with all the obstacles to be overcome.

Though the word *alegria* does mean joy, and the film does eventually arrive at an upbeat resolution, it's a very dark journey to get there. Clowns in full costume keep wandering through the scenes emoting like a latter-day Greek chorus.

Frank Langella is superb as the ringmaster, father of Julietta and father figure to the entire circus troupe. The complex father-daughter relationship is explored with more sensitivity and depth than might be expected from this type of film.

The ringmaster also instructs his players in the philosophy of performance: "We do the show for the people in the dark. They need us. You know life is very tough, life is very hard, it's very cruel.... You have a certain responsibility to the people in the dark. For two hours every night you're not allowed to let life in."
—Oriana Green

■ **ANDY MANGELS** is a long-time Portland entertainment writer with three books and hundreds of comic books and magazine articles to his credit.

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