



Van Sant directs Robert Brown in *Finding Forrester*

requires his audience to enter his world slowly, but fully, and once he has you in his thrall, you're his for the full two hours.

This is the sure-handed work of a mature filmmaker that deserves to find a wide audience; it's also the role of a lifetime for Connery. The Oscar buzz you hear is probably more than wishful thinking.

As a graduate of the prestigious Rhode Island School of Design, Van Sant is, not surprisingly, a multitasking guy. "I started as a painter; that provided a groundwork for visual composition," he explains. "I came to directing as an artist, not a theater director; a theater director can control the chaos, but I need it to be nice."

In addition to his features, Van Sant has directed numerous short films and continues to be attracted to that form. His latest, *Smoking Man*, plays Jan. 12 at the Schnitz as part of Reel Music/Nerve Endings with live music by the Oregon Symphony.

He's also dabbled in music videos, working with the likes of k.d. lang (for *Cowgirls*), the Red Hot Chili Peppers and the pretty boys Hanson.

(Apparently Van Sant wanted even more Hanson; he recently told *Genre*: "I just did an essay on Hanson for *Interview*.... I spent, like, four days taking pictures of them just doing what they normally do in a day.")

Scott Green recalls working with Van Sant on a video for Elton John. "We shot it real quick, in one long night.... Elton wasn't there that much, but when he arrived he had a whole entourage—very dressed up, very Los Angeles."

Green says Van Sant enjoyed working on most of the videos. When asked about the influence of MTV on filmmaking, the director told *Film Scouts*: "What you have now is a whole generation of viewers that will accept any format as valid. And that, to a very large extent, promoted independent cinema, which is still growing."

Music is another passion for Van Sant, and according to pal Green, "He's a very good guitar player...he mostly plays his own music." Green should know—along about 1996 he and Van Sant and Mike Parker formed a short-lived band called the Dots.

Their one and only gig happened at Portland's La Luna. Although Green says it "was just for fun," Van Sant takes his music seriously enough to record some CDs for Tim Kerr Records.

According to Portland chum Heidi Snellman, "Lots of his friends played instruments, so they'd

all jam in the basement of his house.... Thomas Lauderdale is a good friend." She remembers how "Thomas once got Gus to sing *Moon River* a cappella at some big party we were all at. He has a wonderful voice—very Lou Reed-ish."

Snellman laughs softly as she ponders the complexity of the man. "In some ways he's quite straight—he likes to play golf and he likes race cars." Incredibly, one of his CDs consists of 18 songs about golf!

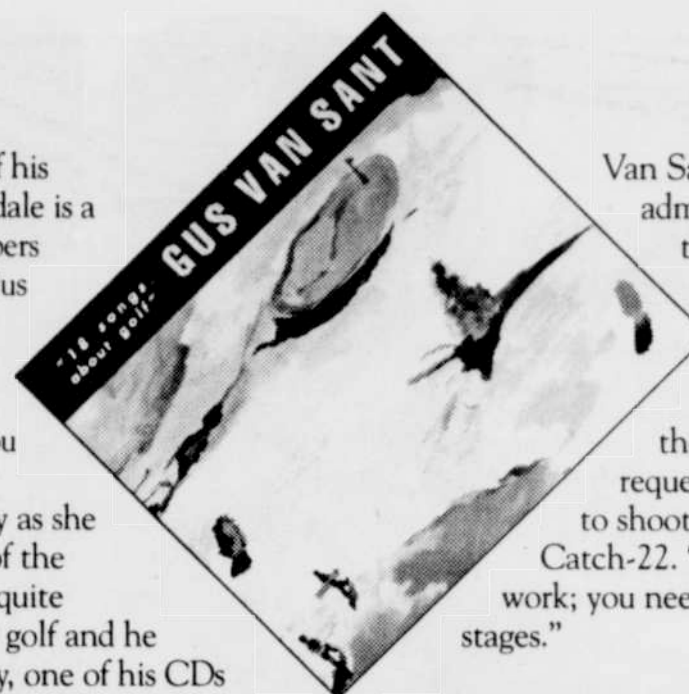
His painterly side still gets exercised—he did the artwork for his album covers and for the *Idaho* poster, which featured floating sombreros. An analyst could have a field day with some of the surreal images in his work, especially things falling from the sky: a barn, cows, sombreros.

One thing he's not, according to Snellman, is very political. Although she adds, "During the first era of No on 9, Gus was very

supportive and active in the campaign and also later with a spinoff group called Artists for Hate-Free America."

When we ask him if he felt like a part of the gay community in Portland, he displays his dry wit. "Yeah, but I didn't run for office or anything."

So is there a chance he might film in Portland again? "The film commission is concerned with making it easy...but the city doesn't make it easy.... It wants conventions, not movies,"



Van Sant says, although he admits he hasn't filmed in the city for about six years.

He explains Portland has no one office to handle the myriad permits and requests and has no stages to shoot on, which is a Catch-22. "You need the stages to work; you need work to get the stages."

Clearly an artist in the prime of his career, Gus Van Sant seems to have figured out what Hollywood and, more importantly, what audiences want and how to deliver it. *Finding Forrester* should cement his reputation as a gifted director and once again give him the license to name his next move. (Let's just hope he's gotten the remake bug out of his system!)

One of the interesting revelations in *Forrester* is that the source of the title character's aversion to the spotlight was the never-ending analysis of his work. Van Sant, whose first two films also went under the microscope, takes a different approach. Back in 1991 when River Phoenix asked him if it bothered him when people try to figure him out, he replied, "No, not at all, because I'd like to figure me out actually." JN

Additional reporting by MARC ACITO

ORIANA GREEN is the Entertainment Editor of *Just Out* and can be reached at oriana@justout.com.

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