

way legend Elaine Stritch) makes up for the predictable plot. **B**

—JR

### No Skin Off My Ass

In the early 1990s, while the New Queer Cinema was busy trying to sell fags 'n' dykes to mainstream audiences, Canadian Bruce LaBruce was happily preaching to the queer choir. 1991's *No Skin Off My Ass* wasn't his first film—it followed a handful of Super 8 shorts—but it was the one that got him attention and fixed his image as a talented trashmeister willing to mix it up with social satire, homo camp and hardcore sex. This low-rent remake of Robert Altman's *That Cold Day in the Park* is a typical LaBruce effort, with the usual pleasures and pitfalls.

LaBruce, who wrote, directed and photographed, also stars here as a hairdresser who obsesses over skinheads. Luckily, right near his apartment he finds a handsome specimen, sitting silently on a park bench. Before you can say wash and set, LaBruce has lured "Skinhead Guy," as he's known, into his apartment. There he gives the bald beauty a bath (using Mr. Bubble), after which he locks his new pal in a bedroom. Of course, this being a Bruce LaBruce movie, Skinhead Guy quickly escapes for a visit to his sister, a lesbian activist filmmaker and graffiti artist. But soon LaBruce and Skinhead are reunited for more edgy fun.

Shot in extra-grainy Super 8 and blown up to 16mm, and mostly lacking synch sound (LaBruce's voice-overs occupy much of the soundtrack), *No Skin Off My Ass* has the look and feel of a low-rent porn flick, with LaBruce's love object the ultimate wish-fulfillment fantasy—a mindless stud who lets LaBruce take every imaginable liberty with him, from boot-

licking to urinal caressing to straightforward blow jobs. And like much porn, this one has stretches of dullness that will send some viewers wishing it was video so they could fast-forward. As gorgeous as Skinhead Guy is, the camera's endless slow crawl over his fetching flesh as he bathes, lounges and lusts becomes numbing after a while.

Still, LaBruce gets points for daring to bare all, and doing it with humor.

A zany soundtrack that includes such ill-matched talents as Karen Carpenter, The Subhumans and Tiny Tim adds to the foolish fun. Screens 7 p.m. May 10 at Guild Theatre as part of the Northwest Film Center's Global Super 8 Anniversary Celebration. **B+**

—Gary Morris

### Palindromes

Writer/director Todd Solondz (*Happiness*) concocts a twisted fairy-tale journey into red-state America. A middle-class 13-year-old (represented by various actors, including Jennifer Jason Leigh) wants nothing from life but to

"have lots and lots of babies," so she runs away from home and into a world of pedophilic truck drivers and psychotically cheerful pro-

mostly effective portrait of the effects of demon alcohol. Set in Edinburgh, Scotland, the film follows Frankie (Kevin McKidd) from his dysfunctional childhood through membership in a violent street gang into a couple of bitter-sweet relationships. Vivid, hard-edged scenes like a tea-room gay-bashing and a nasty encounter at an art show are balanced by Frankie's rueful reminiscences (in voice-over). If the script veers into platitudes too often for comfort, and the "magic realism" fantasy touches sometimes misfire, *16 Years* is still a bracing picture of a life careening into chaos. Now playing at Hollywood Theatre. **B+**

—GM



Jane plays it again in *Monster-in-Law* with Wanda Sykes.

### Winter Solstice

Like *Ordinary People* and *The Ice Storm*, this moving drama paints a damn sad portrait of suburban America. As

depicted by writer/director Josh Sternfeld, a flawlessly landscaped New Jersey neighborhood is just a facade for anger and sorrow. Anthony LaPaglia gives a powerful, understated performance as a reserved widower at odds with two fiercely independent sons. Gangly *West Wing* star Allison Janney plays a new neighbor who brings some levity to their lives. *Solstice* is not plot-driven, and there are awkward pauses in the dialogue. This is the rare film that understands life can't be summed up in three acts. **B+**

—SB j

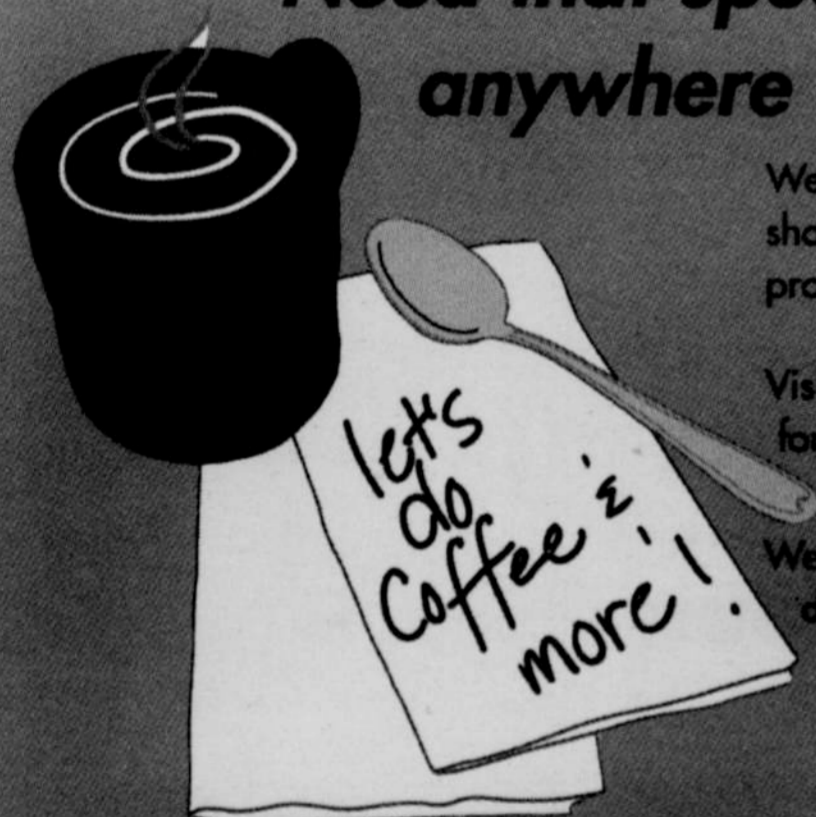
lifers. Solondz's camera stares down both bourgeois liberals (depicted as sheltered, self-absorbed and hypocritical) and conservative hicks (well-intentioned and murderous), creating a didactic, horrifying and strangely compassionate contemplation of the banality of evil in Bush-era America. **B+**

—Christopher McQuain

### 16 Years of Alcohol

Ex-punk rocker Richard Jobson (of *The Skids*) wrote the novel on which he based this

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