

JE: The film is about dealing with success. Under what circumstances do you find your own success depressing?

GVS: Sometimes I feel like, "Why can't things be done a different way?" I'm not sure Kurt was the type of person that thought this way but I imagine could have. I guess in the end it's a not-wanting-to-play-ball reaction.

JE: In making a movie about Cobain, did you try to apply or contradict the aesthetics of Nirvana's music to the film?

GVS: In some ways we used it. Not in obvious ways. I always heard Kurt say about their second album that they were trying to

umentaries such as *Fahrenheit 9/11*—what do you think you are saying about your outlook on life through these films?

GVS: Just through metaphors. If you extend the feelings of politics of today to some things that are particular to this movie, there's a lot of imagery that relates to, in bleak and abstract ways, but in strong ways, to something that might be winding down now like the ends of the Industrial Revolution. An Illinois railroad man built the house we were shooting in. So it's a symbol of affluence at the turn of the 19th century by railroad barons. [Blake] apparently sells locomotive parts, meaning "heavy metal." [Laughs] It's this



From left, Pitt stars in *Last Days* with Lucas Haas and Nicole Vicius.

piss everyone off by making just exactly what they wanted, yet what happened was everyone loved it. They thought they were being experimental, and maybe they were, and the public just liked it. In that way this film might piss people off. Who knows? We're just trying to make the film true to ourselves.

JE: You have taken your past three films from news headlines and made them very personal stories rather than address the larger political spectrum surrounding them. In these highly political, polemic, didactic times—doc-

overview of decay of Western civilization. Like the last days of what might be a type of culture. Maybe a dominant, heavy-metal, bomb-throwing culture. It doesn't really address it specifically. I think energy-wise it can extend to that. It's a reaction to the times that we live in, as is probably all art. Whether you want it to or not. □

JOHN ESTHER is a Los Angeles free-lance film critic whose work has appeared in Cineaste, Curve, Lesbian News and The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review.

REVIEW

Last Days

The latest from Gus Van Sant is a fictionalization of the final days of Kurt Cobain, but, lovely as the film is, it is bound to disappoint those expecting to see anything informatively biographical or directly related to the music of Nirvana and the more sensationalistic aspects of Cobain's tortured life and eventual suicide.

However, viewers who appreciated Van Sant's last feature, *Elephant*, will not feel misled by the purported premise of *Last Days*: It's "about" Cobain's untimely death in much the same way that *Elephant* was "about" the Columbine shootings. The same detached, distancing, matter-of-fact yet austere beautiful techniques Van Sant used in *Elephant* are employed to even greater effect in *Last Days* as real-time episodes of Cobain's last lonely hours play out before us.

The Cobain figure, Blake (Michael Pitt), has isolated himself in a decaying, palatial country home, and we witness him wandering, mulling to himself and possibly high, through the woods and bathing in a stream; opening the door to a Yellow Pages salesman; receiving a concerned record company execu-

tive (Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon); and dealing with his impassive hipster friends, who lend the environs a sexually fluid, bohemian air.

In fact, the film follows a Warholian ethos not only with its ascetic, unflappable tone and pacing, but also with its nonchalant queerness (an attitude, it's worth noting, that Cobain also used for his own exhilaratingly punkish purposes). Blake slips into women's bedtime lingerie and dons eyeliner as if it were part of his usual morning routine, and one narcissistic fellow musician discusses his fling with a female groupie before being beckoned out of the room for a tryst with another male houseguest.

If *Elephant*'s flaw was an intermittent laxity in adherence to its poker-faced, quasi-documentary aesthetic—too many hints, too many "reasons" for the supposedly inexplicable violence—then *Last Days* fulfills Van Sant's stylistically evidenced promise of near-total freedom from psychology, explanation or value judgment. But its stoicism shouldn't be mistaken for indifference: In refusing all falsely noble sentimentalization and reductive excuses, it pays a singularly pure kind of tribute to its subject.

—Christopher McQuain

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