

film

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about bohemians in New York's East Village struggling with life, love and AIDS, *Rent* is the gayest Hollywood drama since *Philadelphia*. And by focusing the action tightly on the eight main characters, the film becomes even queerer than the original show. For instance, the same-sex kisses (both male and female) may be brief, but they pack a big punch on the big screen—same goes for the depiction of AIDS.

Unfortunately, the film is decidedly disjointed. Dialogue now replaces the original recitatives, and these scenes lag considerably. The soundtrack, which includes all the hit numbers, now feels more pop than rock. This emphasizes the words for the first time but also highlights the flaws in the story.

Where director Chris Columbus stumbles worst is his setting. Scenes shot on location crackle with vitality, but both Alphabet City and Mark and Roger's loft are unconvincing substitutes. Even more distracting is

the simulated winter with fake snow and digitized clouds of condensation whenever the characters sing.

The decision to use six of the original cast members is also a mixed blessing. On the one hand, these performances deserve to be memorialized. Those who only know Jesse L. Martin (Collins) from *Law and Order*, for instance, will be amazed at his touching vulnerability, his goofy charm and his rich singing voice. Likewise, Adam Pascal (Roger) proves a surprisingly effective screen actor, while the enormous charisma of gay actor Anthony Rapp (Mark) leaps off the screen.

But the fact remains that they're all 10 years too old. Part of the appeal of *Rent* (as well of *La Bohème*, upon which it's based) is its youthful idealism. With this cast, you just want to say, "Quit your whining and get a job!"

Despite its flaws, though, *Rent* still provides both tears and immense joy. **B+**

—Floyd Sklaver

Sarah Silverman: *Jesus Is Magic*

Sarah Silverman is everything a comedian should

be: neurotic, sex-obsessed, cocksure and impossibly watchable. She's whizzed by you in bit parts (*There's Something About Mary*, *School of Rock*), but her new flick, *Jesus Is Magic*, is an astonishing hour-plus of Silverman front and center. Fart jokes, Jew jokes, Liz Phair-esque semiautobiographical musical sketches. Silverman may leave you wondering which persona is most authen-

tic. Is it the stoner, longing for a big bong hit after a long night of

standup? The Jewish princess who suffers over the number of calories in her Starbucks chai latte? Or the tomboy who "blasts the Yes song 'I've Seen All Good People' out of her orifices in three-part harmo-

ny? *Jesus Is Magic*

is a wild meta-riff on comedy, self-discovery, fucking and—best of all—how to piss off a Republican without ever mentioning politics. Opens Dec. 9 at Cinema 21. **B+**

—Cori Taratoot

Syriana

This political thriller directed by Stephen Gaghan (Best Adapted Screenplay Oscar winner for *Traffic*) gives us a great look into the intrigue of the global oil industry. Quite a few different characters are interwoven with indirectly connected stories, which keeps the audience's attention but also makes it sometimes hard to follow this very complex story. The stellar cast includes George Clooney, Chris Cooper, Matt Damon, Jeffrey Wright, Christopher Plummer, Amanda Peet and Max Minghella (son of director Anthony). At the end you leave the film with the impression that the oil industry is all about money and politics...but you



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knew that anyway. Any similarities to current events are purely coincidental. Opens Dec. 9. **B**

—YPB

Walk the Line

There are plenty of reasons to be wary of this musical biopic. (Remember the dreadful crimes committed by Lou Diamond Phillips in *La Bamba* and Val Kilmer in *The Doors*?) But the reverent performances of Joaquin Phoenix and Reese Witherspoon as Johnny and June Carter Cash will kibosh even the most weathered skeptics, for the film is authentic, vivid and, yes, Oscar material. The process, it seems, left neither actor unscathed: Phoenix is rumored to have gone deep into character, consequently checking himself into rehab post-filming, and Witherspoon reportedly threw up before each vocal performance. Bring your flasks and Benzedrine! **A-**

—CT jo



Sarah Silverman's edgy comedy is razor-sharp in *Jesus Is Magic*.

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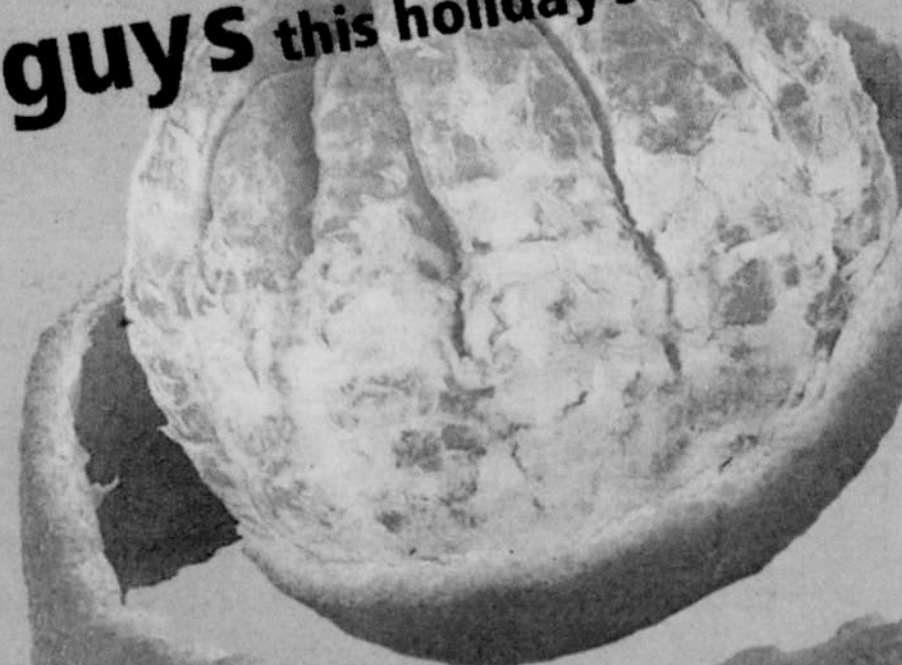


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