

film**Akeelah and the Bee**

If you liked *Spellbound* and *Bee Season*, you will surely love this movie about a gifted but under-motivated 11-year-old student (winningly played by Keke Palmer) living with her widowed mother (Angela Bassett). Staged around her relationship with an underdog word whiz (Laurence Fishburne), the film follows her journey to the Scripps National Spelling Bee and how she unites her neighborhood through courage and inspiration. *Akeelah* might have a predictably sentimental streak, but I think we need feel-good movies like this to balance the bleak stuff that's out there. Opens April 28. **A-**

—Yvonne P. Behrens

American Dreamz

Normally reliable writer/director Paul Weitz (*About a Boy*, *In Good Company*) picks two easy targets—*American Idol* and *Dubya*—and misses by a mile in this toothless, humorless satire starring Dennis Quaid as a doofus president who serves as a guest judge on a television singing contest to boost his sagging poll numbers. **D**

—Jim Radosta

The Notorious Bettie Page

Mary Harron (*I Shot Andy Warhol*) directed this tidy biopic of the dirty pinup model (Gretchen Mol) whose bondage photos resulted in a Senate witch hunt (led here, ironically, by David Strathairn of *Good Night, and Good Luck*). Although Mol resurrects a film career mired in mediocrity, the abrupt ending left me baffled about



Gretchen Mol goes from naughty to nice in *The Notorious Bettie Page*.

Page's sudden conversion to Christianity. Opens April 28 at Cinema 21. **B**

—JR

Old Joy

Fresh from its premiere at Sundance, this film (co-produced by Portland's Todd Haynes) is the story of two lifelong friends who reunite for a weekend campout in the Cascades. For Mark (Daniel London), the trip might be his last chance to be alone before his child is born. For Kurt (Will Oldham), it is a chance to bond with another

human—beyond the homeless guy who asks for change. A slow-moving film with its own rewards, *Old Joy* blurs the lines between camaraderie, male bonding and homoeroticism. Screens 7 p.m. April 26 at Guild Theatre as part of the fourth Portland Documentary and Experimental Film Festival. **B-**

—John Esther

On a Clear Day

This inspirational yet humorous drama is about Frank Redmond (Peter Mullán), a 55-year-old Scotsman who suddenly finds himself laid off after decades of laboring as a Glasgow shipbuilder. Keeping the secret from his wife (Brenda Blethyn) and estranged son (Jamie Sives), Frank decides to challenge himself by swimming the English Channel. Like similar British movies, *On a Clear Day* has you cheering for the underdog and hoping for the impossible. **A**

—YPB

The Sisters

Shot in Eugene, Richard Alfieri's entertaining adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* turns Olga Prozobov's bitter old maid into Olga Prior, a highly educated lesbian. Portrayed by Mary Stuart Masterson (*Fried Green Tomatoes*), Olga is the oldest of three sisters and one brother. Her sisters have difficult relationships with their men, but at least they are allowed to share those relationships in the open. Olga claims she cannot even discuss her loves with her siblings for fear of ridicule. This rings hollow. Although the film barely suggests it, one suspects Olga's closeted attitude is for the sake of

social climbing. Chekhov would be proud of such subtlety. Opens April 28 at Hollywood Theatre. **B**

—John Esther

Sophie Scholl: The Final Days

Based on real events, this moving German film was nominated for this year's Best Foreign Film Oscar. Julia Jentsch (*The Edukators*) delivers a potent performance as a young woman who was arrested and executed in 1943 for her role in an anti-Nazi resistance group called The White Rose. The lengthy scenes between Sophie and her interrogator are intense and claustrophobic, and the despotic courtroom procedures will make your blood boil. Despite all the uncomfortable feelings it evokes, the film leaves you with the hopeful sense that Sophie's humanitarian ideals will ultimately triumph over tyranny. Opens April 21 at Cinema 21. **A**

—SB

Take My Eyes

Watching this Spanish film about domestic violence is like waiting for a time bomb to go off. A timid woman named Pilar flees her abusive husband, Antonio, only to return to him when she believes he has reformed. Suffice it to say that this is not a good move. Explosive performances from the two leads highlight this frightening but ultimately hopeful tale. Not recommended if you have a low threshold for abuse scenes. Winner of Goya Awards—Spain's version of the Oscars—for Best Film and Best Director. Opens April 28 at Hollywood Theatre. **B+**

—SB 10

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