

# film

## The Good German

Director Steven Soderbergh (*Out of Sight*, *Ocean's Eleven*) and George Clooney team up once again for this failed attempt to replicate the look, romance and intrigue of black-and-white classics like *Casablanca*. Clooney is about as charismatic as wallpaper paste as an American reporter assigned to Berlin in 1945. Tobey Maguire is miscast and hopelessly dorky as a scheming Army driver, and an expert German accent isn't enough to help Cate Blanchett overcome the wooden script. **C**

—Stephen Blair

## I Like Killing Flies

Kenny Shopsin is one of New York's secret treasures: a middle-aged, eccentric, improv intellectual who for 32 years has run the infamous diner Shopsin's with a combination of warmth, noise and Soup Nazi-style bitchiness ("No parties of five will be seated—ever!"). Kenny, his family and his establishment are the subject of this engaging 2004 documentary, which offers an irresistible counter to the whole notion of the coldly efficient corporate restaurant. Shopsin's is more like a pub run by a lovable tyrant who's also an expert cook with a menu, according to one devoted customer, offering "about 900 dishes." Between Soup Nazi-style scream-fests, Kenny offers sage wisdom on everything from vermin ("It's very existential, killing flies") to the "sexy pleasure" of creating "fusion" dishes like Barbecue Banana Split ("It's almost like putting your dick in the wrong hole...there's a thrill to it!"). While Kenny is a fascinating one-man show in himself, the film heats up when Shopsin's is given the boot and forced to find new digs. This entertaining film is also an important historical record; sadly, Shopsin's appears to have closed its doors for good at this writing. Opens Jan. 20 at Hollywood Theatre. **A**

—Gary Morris

## Nashville

Two months after Robert Altman's death, his 1975 masterwork is back on the big screen where it belongs. With dozens of subplots and the director's trademark overlapping dialogue, be prepared to get a little bit dizzy as 24 characters converge in Tennessee for five days of country music, love affairs and political campaigns. Altman required all of his actors to write their own songs, resulting in Keith Carradine's Oscar win for "I'm Easy." Lily Tomlin and Henry Gibson anchor the flawless ensemble cast, and Ronee Blakely just about steals the show as a Loretta Lynn-like superstar who suffers a nervous breakdown. A brand new archival print straight from the Paramount archives opens Jan. 19 at Hollywood Theatre. **A+**

—SB

## Opal Dream

Peter Cattaneo (*The Full Monty*) directed this heartwarming story about a little girl, Kellyanne (Sapphire Boyce), who lives with her brother, Ashmol (Christian Byers), and their parents in a rough Australian opal mining community and spends the day playing with her imaginary friends, Pobby and Dingan. When Pobby and Dingan disappear, the impact for the child and the whole community are severe. A great family movie—sometimes slow-moving but definitely worth seeing. Both of the young actors give especially wonderful performances. Opens Jan. 26 at Hollywood Theatre. **B+**

—Yvonne P. Behrens

## Pan's Labyrinth

Real and imaginary worlds collide when a young girl is isolated in the Spanish countryside at the end of World War II. To escape the horrors of the soldiers that her new stepfather commands, and the failing health of her pregnant mother, she discovers a labyrinth, a 10-foot satyr and the key to her destiny as a princess. Stunningly gorgeous, even during its intense moments of war's atrocity and brutality, *Pan's Labyrinth* is the type of story the film medium was meant for. Subtitled and gloomy, this won't be for everyone, but those who see it will have a transcendent experience. Opens Jan. 19 at Cinema 21. **A+**

—Andy Mangels

## Primeval

Although the press materials, advertisements and commercials deceptively make this movie sound



Lily Tomlin anchors the flawless ensemble cast in Robert Altman's 1975 masterwork *Nashville*.

like a serial killer thriller, it's not. It's a giant crocodile movie set in Africa...*Lake Placid* without Betty White and with a hunkier lead: *Prison Break*'s Dominic Purcell, who inexplicably still never quite manages to completely lose his shirt. For a giant crocodile movie, it is well-made, generates a few thrills and even tries for some relevant political statements, but shame on the studio for its deceptive "inspired by a true story" serial killer come-ons. **C+**

—AM **jo**

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