

ly complex slapstick comedy, and he nearly pulls it off. The amazing Ryan Gosling gained 50 pounds to play Lars, a lumpy introvert who comes out of his shell when he starts dating a life-size plastic woman he buys on the Internet. The second half of the film is surprisingly moving and satisfying, but many of the early scenes resemble bad *Saturday Night Live* sketches. Patricia Clarkson is wonderful as Lars' doctor. **B+**

—Stephen Blair

Martian Child

The John and Joan Cusack brother-sister combo awkwardly fumble through their circus of dysfunction in this oversaturated, sentimental attempt at a tearjerker. *Martian Child* is a failed hybrid, a disfigured mutant with the body of a family values piece and the limbs of a romantic comedy. Bobby Coleman radiates as the adopted boy who thinks he is a child from Mars. Look for the stunning cameo from Anjelica Houston, who is a supernova on the screen. **C**

—WB

Milarepa: Magician, Murderer, Saint

Milarepa isn't exactly a household name in the West, but this intermittently engaging biopic aims to change that. The Tibetan Buddhist saint starts life as Thöpag. Before he dies, Thöpag's wealthy father makes his brother promise to raise the boy and give him his inheritance at maturity. Alas, Evil Uncle decides instead to enslave poor Thöpag and the family and keep the dough. Happily, Thöpag learns some lethal magic from a sorcerer. But destroying villages and killing people isn't exactly a path to enlightenment, as our hero finds out. Colorful scenery and a compelling story offset the sometimes wooden acting by the amateur cast. Opens Nov. 2 at Hollywood Theatre. **B**

—GM

Sharkwater

Rob Stewart's feature-length meditation on the beauty and ecological importance of sharks, and the barbaric treatment they receive at the hands of humans, has already garnered piles of accolades in festivals around the world. Flying in the face of *Jaws* and Discovery Channel's sensational *Shark Week*, it presents us as the monsters. Humans haul sharks out of the water, hack off their fins for shark fin soup (a status symbol in parts of Asia) and throw the de-finned shark back into the water to slowly die. *Sharkwater* features gorgeous high-definition cinematography; a lush, ambient soundtrack; and appealing footage of Stewart's

hunky self gliding through the ocean in nothing but a Speedo and scuba gear. If there's any film that can change people's minds about the ocean's top predator, this is it. Opens Nov. 2 at Hollywood Theatre. **A**

—TL

Sleuth

English playwrights Anthony and Peter Shaffer had a great run during the 1970s and '80s. Blessed with a marvelous sense of wordplay, a certain elegant wit and a trunk of cheap theatrics, they made a mint on the West End and Broadway stages and cleaned up at the Oscars with their particular blend of low-brow, high-toned melodrama. What gave their three biggest hits (*Equus*, *Amadeus* and *Sleuth*) their unique cachet was the whiff of subtle gay subtext and chic decadence that formed a velvety bed of perversity under the rapier wit and psychosexual turmoil onstage.

This year has oddly seen both of the brothers' biggest hits yanked kicking and screaming out of their respective closets with decidedly mixed results. Thea Sharrock's West End (and Broadway-bound) production of Peter's *Equus* seemed like the work of a less-than-inspired avant-garde Eurotrash auteur let loose in a gay bathhouse. And now we have the totally unnecessary film remake of Anthony's *Sleuth*, all done up in icy, high-tech, leather ribbons by screenwriter Harold Pinter and director Kenneth Branagh. Joseph Mannkewitz's original film version in 1972 was an elephantine box of chocolates, but at least it had its poisoned heart in the right place and featured a sublime ham-feast performance from Sir Laurence Olivier at his fruity best as well as a subtle and powerful bit of work from Michael Caine as the other half of a killer duo.

Here, Caine is playing Olivier's role without bringing much of anything to it aside from a permanent scowl and a case of very bad temper. Co-star Jude Law gives yet another one of his dirty fawn portrayals, and while he dons an angel-in-the-gutter persona better than anyone else, he is still turning into something of a pansexual cliché. Branagh spends so much time setting up contorted shots showcasing the edgy, hip decor and dot-com surroundings that he can't seem to get a rhythm going between the two actors, and Pinter's adaptation (not much of Shaffer's clever original survives) is surprisingly clodden and obvious for this deft playwright. By the time one gets to the final half-hour's mental S/M gymnastics, this *Sleuth* begins to feel like the desperation of a gay chat room at 3 a.m. rather than the razor-sharp chess match it was based on. **C**

—Jon Kretzu

34th Northwest Film & Video Festival

The Northwest Film Center's annual showcase of new work by regional media artists includes several queer-themed shorts between Nov. 9 and 17: "Morris," about an octogenarian who decides it's finally time to come out of the closet; "No Bikini," about a young girl who defies convention during her summer swim class by passing as a boy; and "The Saddest Boy in the World," in which friendlessness, suburban complacency and prescription drugs conspire against a youngster to make this his worst birthday yet. For a complete schedule visit www.nwfilm.org.

—Jim Radosta 10

MUSSELS AND FRITES AND WATERZOOI OH MY!!

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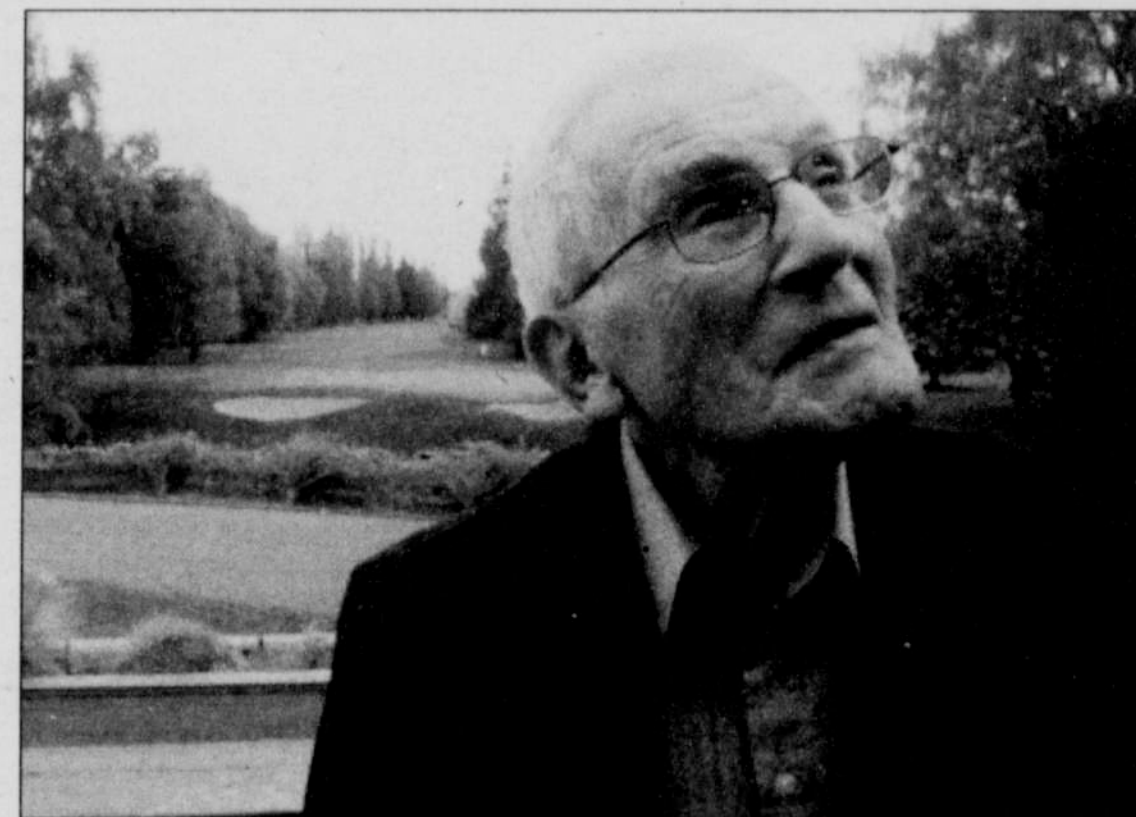


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All ages are represented at the 34th Northwest Film & Video Festival: from top, "Morris," "No Bikini" and "The Saddest Boy in the World."