

## MOVIES

# 'Titanic' leads this year's best movies

## TICKETS PLEASE



JOHN MONAGHAN

The best movies of 1997 came in all shapes and sizes, from the gargantuan \$200 million "Titanic" to the intricate, low-budget beeper saga "Ulee's Gold."

Though it was easy work finding 10 films to single out, the list is short (in fact nonexistent) when it comes to quality movies from overseas. This year's list, in no particular order (except for the first):

■ "Titanic" — Who would have thought that the year's best film would be a disaster movie? Director James Cameron held his epic back from its original summer release to get all the details right in the 1912 disaster, which is vividly recreated here, with a delightful (if unabashedly sappy) love story to make the tragedy personal. Don't be surprised when it cops the Oscar.

■ "Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery" — Mike Myers' dead-on James Bond spoof was so funny it was the only movie this year I went back to see twice. Actually it was more like two-and-a-quarter, when you count the time I snuck out of some turkey I was supposed to be reviewing just to see Austin use "cross mutilation" to take down the deadly Fem-Bots in the theater next door.

■ "When We Were Kings" — I know it won the documentary Oscar last year, but Detroit didn't get it until February. The eye-opening account of the Muhammad Ali-George Foreman 1974 "Rumble in the Jungle" proved a revelation for those (like myself) who have only known Ali since his "The Greatest" days. He was by far the most captivating personality on screen last year.

■ "The Sweet Hereafter" — Canadian Atom Egoyan has built a career out of intense (often pretentious) family melodrama. This time he gets it right when a town tries to come to grips with a school bus accident that claims

virtually all of its children. Ian Holm plays the attorney who arrives with the promise that justice will be served.

■ "Face/Off" — After the disappointing "Broken Arrow," Hong Kong expatriate John Woo hit his stride. I don't know who was more fun: the mind-blowing action scenes (one after another) or the way John Travolta and Nicolas Cage played off of each other's personas.

■ "Boogie Nights" — I can't tell you how many arguments I've gotten into over this one. First off, the movie isn't necessarily about the porno industry as much as about lost souls searching for something that resembles a family. Sure it drags a bit in the second half, but this first more work by 26-year-old Paul Thomas Anderson contains some of the most alive and audacious moviemaking since "Pulp Fiction."

■ "Everyone Says I Love You" and "Deconstructing Harry" —

Any year with two Woody's isn't all bad. The first took the movies' favorite neurotic New Yorker to Europe, where he wooed Julia Roberts (and even sang, along with equally off-key co-stars Alan Alda, Goldie Hawn and Tim Roth). The second showed Allen's nastier side in the story of a self-obsessed short story writer who irritates friends and lovers by putting their intimate details into his fiction. Both showed Allen at the top of his form.

■ "Lost Highway" — David Lynch, after lying fallow since "Twin Peaks," came back with a vengeance in this intentionally perplexing thriller. The two interwoven stories rarely make sense, but his "noir" camerawork, settings, and grotesque performances (especially a devilish Robert Blake) were unsettling in the same ways that made "Blue Velvet" the best movie of the '90s.

■ "Ulee's Gold" — Comeback-of-the-year stories abounded after Peter Fonda's depiction of a

Florida beekeeper reluctantly caught up in his son's dirty business. Victor Nunez let the story unravel gradually, giving Fonda his chance to deliver the one performance that might rank with his famous father.

■ "Kissed" — The year's most tasteful movie about necrophilia came from Canada. Here a young mortuary science student gets intimate with the corpses, but (maybe because it was directed by a woman), the movie is rarely gratuitous. This is the other one I got in a lot of arguments about, but also the one movie of the year (next to "Austin Powers") that deserves a cult following.

Movies I also liked: "I.A. Confidential," "My Best Friend's Wedding," "The Edge," "She's So Lovely," "Irma Vep," "The Daytrippers," "The Full Monty," "George of the Jungle," "Career Girls," "Seven Years in Tibet," "Copland," "In the Company of Men," "Camera: Guardian of the Universe."

Movies I didn't see (but wish I had): "Fast, Cheap and Out of Control," "Crash," "4 Little Girls," "In and Out," "As Good as It Gets," "Starship Troopers," "Ponette," "Wings of the Dove," "Shall We Dance," "One Night Stand."

Movies I did see (but wish I hadn't): "The Lost World," "The Jackal," "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil," "Conspiracy Theory," "A Thousand Acres," "The Designated Mourner," and especially "U-Turn."

Probably the biggest news in movies this year was not the films themselves, but where to see them. The opening of the Star Southfield has spoiled me from seeing movies anywhere else (including the others Stars). The stadium seating, gargantuan screens, and superior sound make this THE place to get the full effect of a movie like "Titanic."

John Monaghan welcomes your calls and comments. To leave John a voice mail message, dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1866.

## Detroit's lively art scene completes good year

## BACKSTAGE PASS



ANN DELISI

Happy New Year! As you sip coffee and watch endless hours of football through eyes so blood-shot that — like the famed canals of Mars — they only hint at past life, remember: This is the last holiday for a while. Now we can get back to the business of enduring a long, cold, gray Michigan winter. Oddly, it's kind of a relief, isn't it?

Just as everybody's schedule gets knocked off kilter by the holidays, so has *Backstage Pass* been preempted by special programming for the last few weeks at Detroit Public Television. With no shows to preview, we've seized the opportunity to check in with our expert contributors to get year-end reviews of the theater, classical music and film scenes in Detroit, as well as previews for 1998. We hadn't yet checked in with our Art Department, so rather than beefing up our life indemnity policy, I called *Backstage Pass* host and Curator of Education at Cranbrook Art Museum David Raul.

David looked back on a year filled with strange events, but I asked him to choose just a few favorites. "One of the highlights of the year was Cranbrook's Being In Time video exhibition." Great choice. For one of our first-ever art segments, I visited Cranbrook to get a peek at the show from David. What a revelation of the power of projected, moving images to work not just as cinema, but in a sense as more traditional visual art in presentation and composition. Interacting with the movement and sound in those pieces truly created haunting moments that we still not forgotten.

David said that "Being In Time" was coming out of sorts for the Cranbrook Art Museum. "Not only did it announce Cranbrook's attitude of wanting to be a forum for contemporary art, but the enthusiasm of the public told us that's what they want. With that in mind, we've actually scheduled another video installation by Bill Viola for '98." I can't wait. The year at the Detroit Institute of Arts impressed everyone in the art community, and David was no exception. "The DIA has announced its renaissance of sorts with a blockbuster 'Splendors of Ancient Egypt,' which surpassed everyone's expectations." We covered this stunning exhibition, too. Marsha Miro, another of our *Backstage Pass* art hosts, got a closed-gallery preview from William Peck, the DIA's Curator of Antiquities. The exhibit really drove home the fact that much of what we have from Egypt transcends artifacts; it's a beautiful art of the highest order.

But the DIA didn't hang their hat solely on Egypt, as David explained, "At the same time as the Splendors, they showed contem-

porary work such as the textiles-based installation "Changing Spaces," the second half of which will premiere early in 1998." OK, this is one we didn't cover in '97. But we have plans to cover part two in January.

Of course, the biggest chunk of any art scene takes place outside the rarified air of a museum. Artists tough it out on the battlefield of commerce in the trenches of the galleries. David reports that local artists and galleries has a fine year. "The gallery scene — from Ferndale and Royal Oak to Birmingham and Pontiac — has been thriving with great work by Gina Ferrari to Beth Kattelman to Magdalena Abakanovich to John Parker Glick, to name only a few great and innovative artists showing in Detroit."

Finally, David has a seasonally appropriate suggestion as we

embark on 1998. "Resolution: See more Art! And if the spirit moves you, buy. If everyone bought a work of art this year, the art market would do very well." Good point. And it's not just the artists and galleries who benefit from these transactions. The purchaser, the community, even the general flavor of the karma in the air all benefit when

we support our artists. It's an interesting paradox: art is a luxury — nobody needs it to survive. Yet societies do need art and culture in order to thrive. Don't agree? Name one exception.

Anyway, now that we've gotten

reviews and previews from our contributors, it's time to get to the business of launching our second calendar year of *Backstage Pass* on Detroit Public Television. For the new year, we're moving to a new time slot, Thursday at midnight with a

rebroadcast on Friday at 7:30 p.m. We have a nice chunk of shows before our next break, so you can get in the habit tuning us in so we can tune you into Detroit's visual and performing arts.

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