

'Gilbert' searches for an audience

BY JOHN MANAGHAN

SPECIAL WRITER

You can't accuse Johnny Depp of whimpering out on film roles. The pretty boy actor whose name sounds like it was developed by a Hollywood agent has starred in John Waters' "Cry Baby" and Tim Burton's "Edward Scissorhands," among others.

Add to the list "What's Eating Gilbert Grape," an offbeat and often moving new film which will hopefully stick around long enough to find an audience.

Depp's Gilbert is a teenager with way too much responsibility. He works at the local grocery not so much for the job opportunity but because he can lug home several bags of groceries each night to feed his 500-pound mother (Dianne Wiest).

She can't cook or even move from the couch to eat, so Gilbert and his two sisters literally bring the dinner table to her. While he loves his mother, Gilbert shares the town's fascination with her freakishness and even hoists

MOVIES

neighborhood kids up the window to get a gander.

On top of this, Gilbert is saddled with Arnie (Leonardo DiCaprio), his almost 18-year-old, mentally handicapped brother. The boy has a bad habit of climbing the local water tower until Gilbert, usually surrounded by a gathering crowd of townspeople, can talk him down.

Depp, sporting long hair and an almost visible weight on his shoulders, looks at home in the dilapidated farmhouse in Endora, Iowa. He gains a new perspective from a worldly and beguiling young woman, played by Juliette Lewis, who stops in Endora while her grandmother's travel trailer is stalled for repairs on the outskirts of town.

Lewis, the young actress so memorable in "Scenes from a Marriage" and Woody Allen's "Husbands and Wives," gives the role

a mystical quality. She inspires Gilbert to live a bit for himself and not just for others.

Stealing scenes from Lewis and a whole-sized actress is no easy task, but Leonardo DiCaprio is so unimpaired and all over the place that you can't take your eyes off of him. He has topped an Oscar nomination for best supporting actor and, if there's any justice at all in Hollywood, he'll win.

"Gilbert Grape" is the latest from Swedish director Lasse Hallstrom, whose bizarrely titled "My Life as a Dog" was an equally unusual account of childhood that developed a minor cult following. Hallstrom turns America's heartland into a place that is both heartbreakingly realistic and also decidedly surreal.

Endora, according to the film, is a small town on the brink of commercialization. The locally owned grocery where Gilbert works is constantly threatened by the monster supermarket across the street, where assistant managers bustle through the aisles and a tank full of live lobsters attracts

customers to the meat department.

Gilbert's best friend, a local lawnmower guy, dreams of owning a Burger Barn, which he considers "on the cutting edge of the fast food industry" because it uses Canada oil for the fries. His other buddy, a mortician's son played by the ever-quirky Crispin Glover, drops less-than-subtle hints about elderly relatives in the hopes of bolstering a sagging family business.

Although it wanders sometimes aimlessly, "Gilbert Grape" is a slice-of-life movie that will probably stick with you a little longer than most. It has an engaging sense of humanity that is at once tragic, life affirming and unforgettable.

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Gornall from page 4B

club into an SRO hot spot for years.

Unfortunately, he has been growing weary of the local scene. By the time you read this, Gornall, one of the haddest guitar players Detroit has ever called their own, is West Coast-bound once again. While he's quick to praise Blue Factory for all they've done for him, he does not want his reputation to begin and end in a handful of clubs in the Detroit area, and on a small label that only has so many resources available for promotion.

His plan is to look up old connections and acquaintances, like John Mayall and guitarist Coco Montoya, and see about getting signed with a big label with a big budget — at least big enough to support a national tour, either in clubs or as an opening act in the arenas.

With Gornall in California, the Detroit blues scene certainly is feeling the loss of a vibrant link.

Wearing a wide variety of influences on his sleeve, from Duane Allman to Stevie Ray Vaughan to Buddy Guy . . . he's a wholly unique player in his own right.

The remaining members of the Blue Collar Blues Band have hardly slipped under the back porch, though. They will continue to perform.

The Blue Collar Blues Band will perform Friday, March 18, at the Sports (A-506 Bar & Grill), 166 Maple, Wyandotte (285-5060); and Saturday, March 19, at Sierra Station, 15110 Mack, Grosse Pointe Park (822-1270) for more information.

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"That's true. I've gotten to shows just as the opening band is bowing and saying, 'Thank you.' I'm sure that they will bail as soon as we leave," the affable Phillips said. "But then again I'm not always grounded in reality."

The band took a break from recording its follow-up to "Fuzzy" when it became clear that they were going to do a few Midwestern dates with Pearl Jam. Both area shows are sold out.

With the release of the album "Modern Life is Rubbish," Blur is hoping that their fans will be able to see their musical focus a little clearer. The English pop band feels the public got the wrong idea about them after they released their 1991 album "Leisure" and the single "There's No Other Way." It's "something with not a great deal of depth," the dishev-

eled lead singer Damon said matter of factly during a press conference at Chicago's Cabaret Metro club. "Modern Life is Rubbish" is lyrically more mature and musically sound. The opening track "For Tomorrow" features the Duke String Quartet under Blur's lush Beatlesque harmonies. The band also retreated to the vocal style in the shamelessly addictive "Sunday Sunday" and "Chemical World."

It doesn't take long to figure out the band's opinion of modern rock. (Start with the title "Modern Life is Rubbish" and the harmonies.) "We made a conscious decision to remove ourselves from all possible comparisons. Here we are now, in our own pigeonhole."

To leave a message for Christian Fucci, dial (313) 953-2047, mailbox number 2130, on a touch-tone telephone, or write her at 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

SCREEN SCENE

A sampling of what's playing at alternative movie theaters across metro Detroit as reviewed by John Managhan.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE
Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call (313) 833-2323 for information. (\$5)

"Betty" (France — 1992). 7 and 9:30 p.m. March 18-19. In this recent work from French storyteller Claude Chabrol, a drunk and homeless woman turns up at a not-too-elegant bar and finds herself involved with an older, upper-class man.

"The Missing Hitchcocks," 4 and 7 p.m. March 20. Hitchcock directed the short films "Bon Voyage" and "Adventure Malgache" in 1944 to support the French resistance, but the British found them way too dark and perverse. Banned upon release and then "lost" for 50 years, these rare examples of wartime propaganda are a must for fans of the famed master of suspense.

KINOTEX
Capitol Theatre and Arts Centre, 121 University, Windsor, Call (519) 971-5160 for information. (\$4.50)

Pier Paolo Pasolini double feature — "Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom" (Italy — 1974) and "Arabian Nights" (Italy — 1975), March 18-20 (call for show times). Two films from the controversial director. Shot in Yemen, Iran and Nepal, "Arabian Nights" is a lavishly spiced adaptation of the ancient text. "Salò" recounts the writings of the Marquis de Sade in a Fascist villa during the waning days of World War II.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE
2218 Woodward, Ferndale, Call (810) 544-3030 for information. (\$4)

"Dazed and Confused" (USA — 1993). 8 p.m. March 17. It's the last day of school in 1976 as teenagers ponder the bigger issues in life, such as who will drive to get the Aerosmith tickets. Richard "Slacker" Linklater di-

rects this subversive and entertaining comedy.

MAIN ART THEATRE
118 N. Main St. at 11 Mile Road, Royal Oak. Films play through at least Thursday. Call (810) 842-1400 for information and show times. (\$6.50; \$4 students; \$3 twilight/matinee)

"The Scent of Green Papaya" (Vietnam — 1993). This Cinderella story about a Vietnamese servant girl in 1950s Saigon has been nominated for a Best Foreign Film Oscar.

"A Streetcar Named Desire" (USA — 1951). Elia Kazan's still-stunning version of Tennessee Williams' most famous play arrives with four additional minutes intact. Although the changes aren't as earth-shattering as the McCarthy-era censors would have liked you to believe, it's still a treat to see the young Marlon Brando on the big screen.

"Six Degrees of Separation" (USA — 1994). Based on John Guare's award-winning play, a savvy young man (Will Smith)

poses as Sidney Poitier's son to cajole his way into the home of a Fifth Avenue art dealer and his wife (Donald Sutherland and Stockard Channing).

"Schindler's List" (USA — 1993). Steven Spielberg may finally get his Academy Award for this story of Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson), a war profiteer and Nazi crony who saved the lives of more than 1,000 Jews during the Holocaust.

MAPLE THEATRE
35 W. Maple Road, Bloomfield. Call (810) 855-9090 for information. (\$5.75; \$3.50 matinee, \$2.95 twilight)

"Naked" (Britain — 1993). In this brazenly dark comedy from Mike Leigh ("Life Is Sweet," "High Hopes"), a deflower shows up on an old girlfriend's doorstep. After a violent fling with her roommate, he takes off in search of companionship on the mean streets of London.

"Schindler's List." See Main Art Theatre listing above.

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