



ON THE BEAT

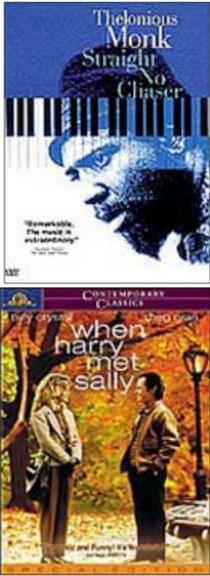
With Andy Goldenberg

North Dallas Forty, Longest Yard Give Viewers Finest in Football History

By ANDY GOLDENBERG
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

On DVD, Warner Brothers brings us two jazz classics with Thelonius Monk, *Straight No Chaser*, as well as *Round Midnight*, with an original, Academy Award-winning score by Herbie Hancock.

Straight No Chaser is a bare bones documentary of jazz pianist, Thelonius Monk. He is considered by many to be one of the greatest



Jazz composers of the modern era. Some regard this film as the greatest jazz documentary ever made. It is well worth any music lover's time. Warner Bros. did a great job with the digital transfer.

Universal/MCA has put out some excellent music DVD's recently including, *The Who, 30 Years of Maximum R&B Live*. The feature has rare archival footage from the band's exclusive vault. Also be sure to check out *Experience*, with Jimi Hendrix, featuring rare video footage from Sweden in 1967 and 1969.

Recently released video anthologies come from Tom Petty, *Sublime* and Blues Summit, a concert featuring B.B. King, Robert Cray, Buddy Guy and other blues legends.

MGM Home Video has dipped into their archives to bring us the Soul Cinema Series on DVD featuring the semi-serious detective series starring Pam Grier, Friday Foster, Sheba Baby and of course Foxy Brown.

Also included in the Soul Cinema series is the hilarious comedy, *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka*, starring Keenen Ivory Wayans. Also just out from MGM is the highly underrated *Mystic Pizza*, starring a young Julia Roberts, as well as the special edition of *When Harry Met Sally*. This gem features interviews with director Rob Reiner and a documentary. The picture is superb on this edition.

Twentieth Century Fox just released an Anamorphic widescreen version of *The Last of the Mohicans* starring Daniel Day-Lewis. The color on this new version is simply masterful. Also just released by

Anything Goes to Grace Stage at SP-F High School

SCOTCH PLAINS - Cole Porter's *Anything Goes* will be this year's offering from the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High Repertory Theater Group.

A cast of student musicians will present a spirited evening of romance and musical comedy, set on a ocean liner, on Fridays and Saturdays, March 23 and 24, and March 30 and 31, at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School on Westfield Road in Scotch Plains.

Tickets are \$8 for general admission and \$6 for students. Renaissance-card holders will be admitted for \$3 and senior citizens will enjoy free admission. Tickets should be purchased in advance to assure seating.

For more information, please call (908) 233-8643.

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20th Century Fox is the delightful *Woman On Top, Me Myself & Irene*, and *Bedazzled* starring Brendan Fraser and Elizabeth Hurley.

Anchor Bay Entertainment continues its release of controversial, yet interesting films such as the comedy, *Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down* with Antonio Banderas and Victoria Abril.

Forget about the pitiful attempt by historical revisionist Oliver Stone to capture the craziness of football. That honor goes to two films recently given a DVD release by Paramount Home Video, *North Dallas Forty* starring Nick Nolte in one of his finest roles.

The movie was based on former football player Peter Gent's novel of the same name. *The Longest Yard*, released in 1974, is the hilarious account of a football game between the inmates of a prison and the guards. This great film stars Burt Reynolds and Eddie Albert.

Finally, Paramount also just cranked out the 1974 thriller, *Death Wish*, starring Charles Bronson.

Sacred-Secular Music To be Presented At Holy Trinity Church

WESTFIELD - "Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing," a concert of sacred and secular choral music by the great masters, will be presented by the South Mountain Chorale on Sunday, March 25, at 4 p.m. at the Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church, located at Westfield Avenue and First Street in Westfield.

The South Mountain Chorale, based in Essex County, was established last fall. The program will be conducted by the group's founder, F. Allen Artz, with Louise Andrews as accompanist.

The concert will be presented free of charge and the public is invited to attend.

Monmouth Art Festival To Include Westfielder's Works

WESTFIELD - Natalie Becker of Westfield will be among over 250 local and regional artists, including many prestigious award winners, whose work will be displayed at the 31st Annual Monmouth Festival of the Arts.

The festival will be held from Saturday, March 24, to Wednesday, March 28, at the Monmouth Reform Temple, 332 Hance Avenue in Tinton Falls.

A pre-opening reception will be held on March 24 from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. Admission to the reception is \$35 in advance or \$40 at the door.

Ms. Becker, who works in oils, has received high acclaim for her artwork. Those honors include the 1989 Grumbacher Award from the National Association of Women Artists, the 1992 Lehrer Memorial Prize for Landscape from the Allied Artists of America (National Exhibition), as well as



Evelyn Bleeke to Lead Choir In Schubert's Mass in G Major

WESTFIELD - Choral conductor Evelyn Bleeke of Westfield will lead the Chancel Oratorio Choir in a performance of Franz Schubert's *Mass in G Major* in the Sanctuary of the First Presbyterian Church of Cranford at 10 a.m. on Sunday, March 25.

The oratorio will be accompanied by a string group with organist Robert Grube.

Two soprano soloists, also from Westfield, will be featured. They are

Elsa Gail Hahn, who teaches music at Franklin Elementary School in Westfield, and Ann Weeks, a teacher of elementary music in Bridgewater.

Soloists David Armitage, John Duryee and Norman Brubaker from Cranford will also perform.

The Chancel Oratorio Choir will be augmented by some members of the Choral Art Society of New Jersey. Mrs. Bleeke conducted the society chorus and orchestra for 32 years.



SALUTING YOUTH AND THE ARTS... Westfield Mayor Gregory S. McDermott proclaimed March as "Youth in Art Month" in town. He signed the proclamation in the presence of, left to right, President of the Westfield Coalition for the Arts Catherine Marchant, Chairperson of the Fine Arts Committee of the Parents-Teacher Council Patty Minkys, and Westfield High School art teacher Barbara Flynn. In his proclamation, Mayor McDermott wrote, "Youth Art Month is an opportunity to support the purposes and practices of art education and encourage teachers, parents, and all citizens to participate."

Peace Poster Contest Won By Student Samantha Manetti

WESTFIELD - Samantha Manetti, a seventh grader at Roosevelt Intermediate School in Westfield has won the local competition in the International Association of Lions Clubs Peace Poster Contest sponsored by the Westfield Lions Club.

To recognize her achievement, Samantha was presented with an engraved desk set and a U.S. Savings Bond by Westfield Lions Club Peace Poster Chairman Douglas Schembs, Jr.

Mr. Schembs said he was impressed by the amount of effort exhibited by the students at Roosevelt School.

"It's obvious that these young people have strong ideas of what peace means to them. I'm so proud that we were able to provide them with the opportunity to share their visions with all of us," said Mr. Schembs.

At the district judging level, Samantha's poster competed against 40 other entries. While not winning first place, her entry did earn an honorable mention.

Lions Clubs International sponsors the Peace Poster Contest every year to emphasize the importance of world peace to youngsters throughout the world.



GIVING PEACE A CHANCE... Samantha Manetti shows off her winning poster and receives a certificate from Westfield Lions Club Peace Poster Chairman Douglas Schembs, Anne Cohen, Roosevelt Intermediate School art instructor, shares the special honor with her student.

St. Peter by the Sea Concert Planned for Spring by YFCS

WESTFIELD - The Youth and Family Counseling Service (YFCS) Concert Committee invites long-time and first-time supporters to its Annual Spring Concert by the Orchestra of St. Peter by the Sea, conducted by the Reverend Alphonse Stevenson. The agency is now seeking sponsors to help underwrite the event.

The concert, which will benefit YFCS, will be held on Saturday, April 21, at Union Catholic Regional High School in Scotch Plains.

Rev. Stevenson and his orchestra of professional musicians will present a unique musical program that will include uplifting tunes from Broadway and films, classical favorites, and some surprises. His concerts appeal to a large intergenerational audience each year.

The concert represents the only annual fundraising event of the agency. Proceeds help to support counseling of clients who cannot afford to pay the full cost of treatment.

YFCS, a non-profit agency, has been providing help for more than 80 years to troubled individuals and families from Berkeley Heights, Clark, Cranford, Garwood, Mountainside, Rahway, Scotch Plains and Westfield.

Sponsors will be mailed two tickets to the concert and their names will be listed with other sponsors in the evening's program. To become a sponsor, please mail a tax-deductible check in the amount of \$300 to Youth and Family Counseling Service, 233 Prospect Street, Westfield, 07090.

For more information about the agency or the concert, please call YFCS at (908) 233-2042.

POPCORN™
The Mexican
Makes You Want to Take a Siesta
By Michael S. Goldenberger
One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

1 popcorn
It was supposed to be the movie match made in heaven. But when Julia Roberts and Brad Pitt get together in *The Mexican*, they wind up making the film from hell. The sparks don't fly. The chemistry doesn't mix. And our only consolation comes in knowing that even powerful Hollywood can't force feed us these two pretty faces against our will. At least not without direction more astute than the sort Gore Verbinski displays. And certainly not without a better script than the one J.H. Wyman tries to pawn off on us.

Happily, you'll be planning to avoid this film. So none of this is your worry. That is unless political considerations beyond your control put you in a theater where this mis-carriage of motion picture calculation is being shown.

In that case, your only hope is that the usher will find a reason to eject you. And the sooner, the better. For starters, Julia and Brad as bickering lovers Samantha Barzel and Jerry Wellbach are about as credible as the apologetic telemarketer who called you during dinner last week. And they both have that toothpaste advertisement glow. Isn't there a picture of them flossing in your dentist's waiting room?

In any case, we're supposed to believe that the Mob is into Jerry, poor schlumpf that he is, ever since he accidentally crashed into the head honcho's car. As the story goes, the fender-bender proved especially embarrassing for the Don because when the police arrived, he just happened to have some human cargo in the trunk....alive, thankfully.

Nevertheless, he was promptly shipped up the river for his troubles. Ever since then, Jerry has helped organized crime continue a proud American tradition dating back to Colonial times: indentured servitude.

Naturally, the accidental mobster's career path doesn't lend itself to the type of relationship Samantha wants. She demands that he quit. Which poses a tragic dilemma for Jerry. Yet fearing for his life, he perseveres. And each time he is told that this last job will finally mean his emancipation.

This latest assignment has him traveling down Mexico way to purloin an antique pistol steeped in folklore. But it's hard to get the story of this gun right, and depends on who's telling the tale. In this so-called comedy's only decent bit of shtick, different variations of this pistola's mythology, crafted in septia flashback, serve as a running gag.

Meanwhile, back in L.A., Samantha is a wellspring of psychological catch phrases, no doubt gleaned from a lifetime of imbibing motivational speakers on public television....you know, the modern day Svengalis they feature during the beg-a-thons.

In fact, when she's kidnapped by hit man Crazy Leroy (James Gandolfini) as the Mob's insurance that Jerry will complete his mission, Samantha proudly informs her captor that she's got her junior achievement gangster to go to group therapy with her.

In short, this poster girl for touchy-feely sentiment is entirely annoying. Of course, Leroy doesn't feel that way. Call it the Stockholm Syndrome with a dab of cinematic fantasy. He thinks she's charming. She feels likewise.

Dishing the dirt like old girlfriends, captor and captive all but exchange recipes. In hotels, diners and cars, the relationship talk runs rampant. Too bad that Leroy will have to kill his comely charge if things don't work out for her boyfriend south of the border.

Otherwise, being taken hostage seems like a great way to meet your soul mate.

But employing such exaggerated story motifs isn't what ultimately makes *The Mexican* come up short. In fact, the notion that Gandolfini's sensitive bruiser might be able to help the lady fair sort out her love life is a democratic motion picture impertinence with roots in 1930s screwball comedy.

The mechanism provides a funny moment or two. However, by never deciding on a tempo or a tone for itself, director Verbinski's overlong effort fails to establish just what sort of a film it's trying to be. And while the commercials would lead you to believe it's a comedy, only a few minutes in the theater convinces that this is a prime example of false advertising.

Here's the problem. Whether he knows it or not, Verbinski pretty much attempts the impossible when he mixes violence, R-rated language and would-be gags. It can be done, mind you. It's called a black comedy. But this requires a screenplay to match, wherein the writer employs sarcasm, wit and creativity to juxtapose and comically reconcile the movie's disparate elements. Sadly, hardly any wit and even less creativity are recognizable in this movie's script.

And then, as if to add insult to injury, there is again the matter of Julia and Brad. Both decent actors in their own right, together these stars of the first magnitude bring out the worst in each other.

Coming across more like whiny spoiled refugees from Suburbia than the pair of struggling lovers they're supposed to be portraying, the Western Hemisphere's most well-scrubbed sexual icons might be believable playing the title roles in *Ken and Barbie: The Movie*. But the lousy job they do in *The Mexican* is, quite frankly, almost un-American.

The Mexican, rated R, is a DreamWorks release directed by Gore Verbinski and stars Julia Roberts, Brad Pitt and James Gandolfini. Running time: 125 minutes.