

Arts & Entertainment



POPCORN™ 8 Mile: Rap City In Black & White

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
3 POPCORN

Director Curtis Hanson's quasi-fictional, perhaps partial biography of rap sensation Eminem paints some startlingly evocative portraits of the youth culture from which its protagonist, Jimmy Smith, Jr., a.k.a. Rabbit, emanates.

Probably the most provocative thing about *8 Mile* is not what it says about yet another teen idol's meteoric rise from slum to stardom, but rather, what it doesn't say.

Somewhere between the lines of Hanson's emotionally-charged depiction of poverty, advance, racism, sensuality and the rap ditties ghetto kids develop to poeticize their plight, there may be great sociological insight...or at least some interesting notions.

It can't be described in clever rhymes because they are not so much thoughts as feelings rooted in a generation. I suspect that no matter how hip one is to the proverbial jive, a complete appreciation of *8 Mile* is reserved for those who view the film as the long-awaited coming of their mantra.

That doesn't mean that an ex-Hippie, Beatnik or Be-bopper cannot enjoy and then recount the film from an academic point of view. Naturally, said discourse should be healthily peppered with good-natured

patronization. I mean, yo-yo. It's only fitting. Rap thrives on the protest and acerbic one-upmanship that comprise its lyrics. Let's face it. As insightful as Eminem's staccato-delivered pontificating may be, it nonetheless leaves little reason for Robert Burns to worry.

Still, there's no denying director Hanson's effort is a winner. My younger spies inform that *8 Mile*, a sort of "Iliad" for the Hip-Hop set, is indeed being embraced as a liberating justification for a medium still not granted a pedigree in many musical circles.

Movie success could represent a mixed blessing for the genre's baggy-pants purveyors. Part of rap's allure is the threat, vociferous as well as implied, that it issues to the older generation. Now there is this cinematic explanation to somewhat demystify the phenomenon.

True, rap's detractors may still worry that these Pied Pipers of street-inspired verse will lead their children to the river, or worse. At least now they are assured that deep down, beneath the layers of hooded sweatshirts, parkas, woolen beanies and cynicism, those that can will eventually trade in their uniforms of rebellion for a job with benefits, a split-level in the suburbs and two weeks at the shore every summer.

A select few, like Eminem, icons of the movement they inspire, will make a grand living of it. He'll stir up just enough trouble to keep the anti-establishment fantasy alive. The art is in maintaining the image without going overboard. James Dean did it to a fault. Elvis perfected it, at least for a while. The rock groups of the 60s institutionalized it. While Eminem may not like the suggestion that he is merely the latest to profit from the angry young man angle, his Hollywood adventure practically memorializes it.

Eminem's movie outing continues a tradition. What's amazing is that, after all these years, from *Dead End (1937)* through *Rocky (1976)* and now with *8 Mile*, we still haven't run out of the poverty necessary to keeping relevant the heroic tales of poor boys overcoming their oppressive circumstances. And boy is there poverty in Eminem's contemporary Detroit.

If this movie is his postcard to the old neighborhood, you certainly couldn't tell it. Hardly a scene doesn't highlight the decrepit, decaying portions of the city. The rap star's love-hate affair with 313 (the Motown area code) reminds of how those cautionary, urban-based sci-fi films like *Soylent Green (1972)* and *Bladerunner (1982)* depicted the cities of the future.

That was before entrepreneurs realized en masse that there was money in them that slums (Can you say gentrification?). Yet there are no revitalized sections of Detroit shown here, not even as a point of contrast.

All of which gives this version of the Horatio Alger saga a slightly different look than we're accustomed to seeing. The optimism doesn't abound, but is doled out in stingy, pessimistic portions. The streets are inevitably rain-soaked. It is practically always night.

When it's daytime, as in one scene outside the auto stamping plant where Rabbit works, the wintry sky is forbidding, the crumbling factory buildings bleak. So when the aspiring rap artist outshines two fellow workers at the lunch truck in an extemporaneous contemplation on their delusions of grandeur, the contest victory is more a matter of survival than glory. It's also a needed vindication.

Just the night before at The Shelter, a large, ominously bare-boned hall where rappers "battle" one-on-one for bragging rights before an SRO crowd of predominantly black spectators, the white upstart choked in his maiden attempt. No matter the result.

The challenge alone further fired up an already existing enmity between his group of pals and another clique presided over by the reigning champ. Director Hanson ("L.A. Story") never addresses the racial implications from an editorial point of view, wisely managing to achieve a much greater reality by letting the dialogue tell that aspect of the story.

Into this mix toss a shady, street wastrel of a love interest played by Brittany Murphy. Then add a perennially unemployed mom (Kim Basinger) about to be evicted from the trailer where, to Rabbit's embarrassment, she lives with a former classmate of his. Otherwise there's not much plot...just a week of dramatic events predictably leading up to the big rap confrontation.

But there's enough grit to start a sandpaper company.

If poet Rod McKuen is the million dollar heartache, then Eminem is the multi-million dollar kvetch. Now he engagingly brings his complaint to the big screen. Whether or not he'll be able to further parlay his success with *8 Mile* into a legitimate film career won't be evident until he logs a little more distance on the Hollywood highway.

8 Mile, rated R, is a Universal Pictures release directed by Curtis Hanson and stars Eminem, Kim Basinger and Mekhi Phifer. Running time: 111 minutes.

Local Celebrity News

Berkeley Heights Native Pens Mystery, 'Six Strokes Under'

BERKELEY HEIGHTS — A native of Berkeley Heights, Dr. Roberta Isleib has written her first



Dr. Roberta Isleib

mystery novel, "Six Strokes Under," about a woman, Cassie Burdette who reaches for the dream of a lifetime — qualifying as a professional golfer on the LPGGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) Tour.

In "Six Strokes Under," a fellow competitor is disqualified for carrying illegal equipment and another files suit against her father after recovering repressed child-

hood memories. Cassie's personal baggage threatens to harm her stability. Then the bodies start to fall, and Cassie realizes that professional competition can be murder.

Dr. Isleib combined her training and experience in psychology, along with her passion for golf when writing this novel.

Formerly in private practice and the faculty advisor for the Yale University peer counselors, Dr. Isleib has published articles on golf psychology in *Women's World of Golf*, *Golf for Women*, *Tea Time Magazine*, and *National Golfer*.

Westfield Community Band Plans Season of Festive Holiday Concerts

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Community Band is preparing for another season of holiday activity in Westfield.

On Sunday, December 1, at 5 p.m., the band's Holiday Brass will perform at the Westfield Train Station. The brass ensemble, comprised of members of the larger symphonic band, will perform favorite holiday carols to welcome Santa Claus to Westfield.

The Holiday Brass is comprised of the larger Westfield Community Band and members of the Holiday Brass may also be found performing in

downtown Westfield throughout the holiday season.

The Westfield Community Band will also be joining the Edison Intermediate School's Broadway Singers on Wednesday, December 4, at 8 p.m.

The 13th Annual Holiday Concert, sponsored by the Westfield Recreation Department is an annual tradition in Westfield.

The Westfield Community Band is sponsored by the Westfield Recreation Department, Bruce Kaufman, Director. For more information, please contact (908) 789-4080.

Young People's Theatre in S. Plains Slates Four Productions in Winter

SCOTCH PLAINS — Young People's Theatre (YPT) a non-profit organization made up of parent volunteers from the five elementary schools and two middle schools in Scotch Plains-Fanwood, will present four professional shows for youngsters. The Winter 2003 performances will include:

•Saturday, January 11, 2003 — *Imagination in Motion* (a movement and mime performance with audience participation);

•Saturday, February 8, 2003 — *Gizmo Guys* (jugglers who juggle household everyday objects);

•Saturday, February 22, 2003 — *Skate n' Break* (high energy roller dancers on roller skates combined with break dancers demonstrating break dance moves);

•Saturday, March 22, 2003 — *Reading Rainbow* (a Theaterworks production of PBS's award winning program).

Advance ticket sales have begun for all shows and will continue through November. Pre-show prices are \$5 each or \$20 for a series of four. After November, ticket sales will be \$6 for each at the door, Nut 'n' Plenty, Scotch Hill Pharmacy and Dairy Queen. Early ticket purchases are advised.

All shows will be held at Terrill Middle School in Scotch Plains. Each performance begins at 1 p.m. and the doors open for general seating at 12:35 p.m.

Tickets may be purchased by contacting Elisha Monzella at (908) 322-8087 or emonzella@hotmail.com. Please indicate name, phone, number of tickets, and shows of interest. Ms. Monzella will arrange for ticket pick-up.

Funding in part made possible by



Stocking Stuffers, Gifts On Sale During Evergreen's Annual Arts, Craft Show

SCOTCH PLAINS — Evergreen Elementary School in Scotch Plains will host its Third Annual Arts and Crafts Show on Saturday, December 7, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., featuring stocking stuffers, and unique items crafted by quality artisans.

Refreshments, giveaways and prizes will also be featured. Admission is free.

Vendors are still being accepted for the show, however, space is limited. Electrical outlets are available, but are limited.

For more information, please call Kim Palmer at (908) 233-3144 or Lisa Magnatta at (908) 322-4940.



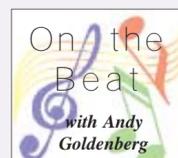
Cheri Rogowsky for The Westfield Leader and The Times

EXHIBITING ARTIST...The Eighth Annual Juried Photography Show, which was curated by Nancy Ori of Berkeley Heights and Michael Cream of Summit, was held at the Watchung Arts Center on November 10. A member of the Poet's Society, Marlene Golab of Elizabeth stands before her photograph, "The Tempest Sky." Her work is represented in many area galleries, including Galeria West in Westfield.

Recent Releases Are Worth Adding to Gift-Giving List

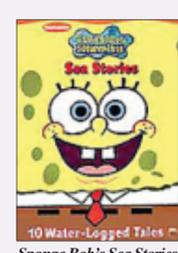
By ANDY GOLDENBERG
Specialty Writer for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Our good friends at Sanctuary/ Castle Records have obtained the rights to release some primo Neil Young concert video. Recorded in 1978 at the Cow Palace in San Francisco, the "Live Rust" DVD captures Neil Young and Crazy Horse in their prime, live and loud how we like them. The video transfer is perfect.



Sanctuary also released a great-sounding double CD from Black Sabbath. "Past Lives" captures the metal pioneers in peak form from the early to mid-70s.

Finally, Sanctuary also just released the latest Pulp album, "We Love Life." Pulp is one of the great "under-the-radar bands." So, if you like dark, insightful lyrical imagery, then you must pick up this CD.



R C A / B M G Records just released two great Lou Reed reissues. "Take No Prisoners" captures Reed live at the Bottom Line on his home turf in New York. The sound quality is great and includes such Reed classics as "Sweet Jane" and "Coney Island Baby," as well as the classic Velvet Underground tune, "Pale Blue Eyes."

Recently hitting stores is a re-mastered version of Reed's seminal "Transformer," which includes "Walk on the Wild Side" and "Satellite of Love," as well as two bonus tracks.

Sony/Legacy just released "The Essential Leonard Cohen," a double-disc set of Cohen's dark and mostly acoustic folk offerings. The sound quality is incredible as some of these recordings are 30 years old and most of the "hits" are included such as, "Suzanne" (a hit for Joan Baez) "Bird on a Wire" (covered by Judy Collins and Joe Cocker) "Chelsea Hotel" (about Janis Joplin) and "First We Take Manhattan," covered by REM.

I hope Sony can release the whole back-catalog as Cohen is one of music's true legends.

Some great Alternative-Country has been coming out in droves courtesy of Lost Highway Records, including Ryan Adam's terrific "Demolition," a new collection of tunes that the prolific Adams had recorded the last few years that did not make it onto any of his albums.

Other Lost Highway releases include Kim Richey's "Rise" and the new acoustic beauty from



Johnny Cash, "The Man Comes Around," featuring covers of "Desperado" "In My Life" and "Bridge Over Troubled Water."

Another great Alternative-Country label making its mark is Bloodshot Records out of Chicago. Some great new releases from Bloodshot include Rex Hobart and the Misery Boys' "Your Favorite Fool," The Waco Brothers' "New Deal," as well as Neko Case's new album "Blacklisted." All three will have you stompin' your feet.

Some great DVDs also hitting stores include *David Gilmour In Concert* (EMI/Capitol), featuring the solo performance by the Pink Floyd's guitarist David Gilmour live at the Meltdown Festival in London. Gilmour covers some classic and obscure Floyd tunes, as well as a beautiful version of Richard Thompson's "The Dimming of the Day." The sound and picture are fantastic. Many kudos go out to Capitol for releasing this gem.

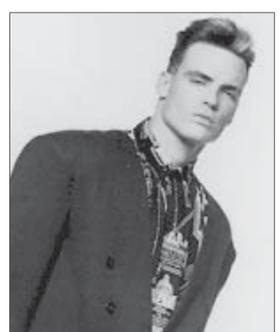
Paramount Home Video continues to turn out great releases for young and old, and this month is no exception with the Alfred Hitchcock classic, *To Catch a Thief*, starring Cary Grant and Grace Kelly.

For the toddlers, Paramount just came out with *Blues Clue's Get to Know Joe* and *Sponge Bob Square Pants Sea Stories*, which I can attest to being terrific because my 18-month-old gave me the two Ga-Ga's Up! Of course being the son of a critic has made him particularly fickle.

Lastly, our friends at MVD (Music Video Distributors) bring us classic Rock DVDs, including the final performance from Rod Stewart and the Faces in *The Final Concert*. All the great tunes are here including, "Twisting the Night Away," "You Send Me" and "Sweet Little Rock and Roller."

Be Glad For the Song Has No Ending is a unique period piece about the late 60s English Folk band, The Incredible String Band.

Finally, for you Progressive Rock fanatics, MVD has just released Steve Hackett, The Tokyo Tapes, Live in Japan. The former Genesis guitarist is joined by such Rock luminaries, such as John Wetton of Asia and drummer Chester Thompson of Weather Report, to groove on several Genesis and King Crimson tunes. The sound and picture are top-notch.



NO MATCH...Vanilla Ice, the last Caucasian rapper, had 15 minutes of fame and we thought the same would happen to Eminem once he arrived on the scene. Those 15 minutes have turned into years.

had little to do with the early release of the No. 1 hit, "Lose Yourself," or his negative reputation which has plagued him for years, but everything to do with the oddest discovery of all...the man can stun audiences with some noteworthy acting skills. Who'd ever think it?

This may come as a great shock to those who, for better or worse, have figured me to be a super rightwing conservative who would rather tape up Eminem's mouth that let him rant, but I like the guy and would defend (to the death) his right to say what's on his mind, whether I agree with him or not. It's quite the dichotomy when I'm barreling my car toward church for choir practice, chanting the lyrics to Eminem's "Cleaning Out My Closet."

So many musicians, with minimal success stories, have attempted the crossover from the creation of music videos to the production compelling movies. Songsters like Jennifer Lopez and Barbra Streisand have given critics a run for their money by making respectable forays into both forms of media, but Eminem has female hearts of all ages swooning and doubting Thomases reconsidering because of *8 Mile*, which shows his vulnerability and his humanity. He's simply not the hard-hearted monster that GLAAD, NOW and tear-jerking moms painted him to be.

Unlike the melting Ice, Eminem, whether you love him or hate him, (and most people do react to him in extremes) has the staying power and immeasurable endurance to make it in a business that chews people up and spits them out. He's not going anywhere... but to the top where he belongs.

Color My Dog Yellow...
unique dog portraits painted by
Tine Kirkland Graham
Bring in your photos now!
For a great Christmas gift!
Saturday, November 23, 2002
10:00 am to 3:00 pm
Evalyn Dunn's Gallery
549 South Avenue, West
Westfield, NJ 07090
Tel: 908.232.0412
email: framer397@aol.com