

At the movies

Some films get off to a great start, and others just won't go away. Here's a look at the movies that came out with a bang and continue to linger at the box office

Why *Traffic* jammed at the Oscars

by John Federowicz
staff writer

Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* is a high-voltage drama that advocates neither side of the American war on drugs. Instead, Academy Award winning director Soderbergh barrages the audience with tightly edited vignettes that portray both the "good" and the "bad guys" involved in illegal drug importation from Mexico to the United States. These portraits of warring drug factions are ambiguously wrought, and the biggest question becomes "whom should we side with?"

The answer is left wide open as Soderbergh, instead of probing moral issues, focuses on the act of stylized cinema. The screenplay (which is lent credibility by the writer's ex-drug user status) imbues *Traffic* with a gritty, in-the-trenches realism that garnered Stephen Gaghan the recent Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay.

Soderbergh carves out a prominent place as a director par excellence with

Traffic, employing a jittery handheld camera (that he, at times, wields himself) and a grainy cinematography. Together, they create a visceral feel. *Traffic* is not unlike the raw spontaneity of documentary footage. Soderbergh's tour-de-force crackles with intensity under his dynamic direction—the Academy, in fact, did not turn a blind eye to *Traffic*'s direction, bestowing upon Soderbergh the kudos of Best Director.

Among those on the roster of *Traffic* are such salient stars as husband and wife duo Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones. Douglas turns in a starchy performance as an Ohio State Supreme Court justice nominated by the president to spearhead the American war on drugs while his daughter contends with a cocaine addiction. This adds an ironic twist to the newly appointed anti-drug czar's mantle of authority. Conversely, real-life wife Zeta-Jones turns in a sultry performance as a woman whose ethics slip into ruthlessness when she realizes

that her life is entrenched in crime. This about-face leads to her ultimate seizure of her husband's drug legacy.

Benicio Del Toro's portrayal of a Mexican lawman battling overwhelming odds from within the Mexican police system is of a romantically heroic proportion. Yet, Del Toro's grounded, unassuming demeanor keeps the movie from sliding into sentimentality. Indeed, Del Toro's morally rifted officer upholds the law by informing American DEA agents about Mexico's internal corruption, lending the movie a true poignancy. The Academy honored Del Toro with the Best Supporting Actor award for this role.

In the final equation, *Traffic* offers no easy answers as it probes into the underbelly of the heavily trafficked drug trade of America. The movie, a stylized breakthrough of a film with riveting performances throughout, makes this a cinematic experience not to be missed.

Pitt and Roberts break the curse of *The Mexican*

by Lucas Schneider
staff writer

The Mexican was much more of a drama than it appeared to be in trailers. It dealt more with mob ties than with the comedic antics of Brad Pitt and Julia Roberts, as crime bosses used any means necessary to assure a "curled" gun was returned to the criminals it belonged to. The film is not disappointing, however, as it makes for great entertainment.

Brad Pitt plays Jerry, a man with ties to organized crime—but not by choice. Jerry has been given two ultimatums: The first is from his mob boss to go to Mexico and retrieve a priceless antique pistol, known as "The Mexican," or suffer the consequences. The second is from his girlfriend Samantha (played by Julia Roberts) to terminate his job with the mob or deal with her consequences. Jerry would much rather be with Samantha, but chooses the "job" and staying alive over another argument with her. So he heads south of the border and she embarks solo on their anticipated Las Vegas trip.

For Jerry, finding the pistol is the easy part, getting it home is another job entirely. The pistol comes with a curse passed on from a gunsmith who crafted the weapon as a dowry for his daughter's marriage to the son of a rich nobleman. When the gun was tested for the first time it misfired, shooting one of the townspeople. It was tinkered with again and again, but was eventually put away never to be used again.

Meanwhile, in Las Vegas, Samantha meets up with Leroy (played by *Sopranos* star James Gandolfini), a hit man who kidnaps Samantha to ensure that Jerry sticks to the matter at hand. "I'm just here to regulate funkiness," he explains.

Although the film has been in theaters for several weeks, it's popularity has kept it kicking in the wake of new releases. The pull of Pitt and Roberts is fun to watch, and aided by Gandolfini, *The Mexican* is an entertaining way to spend a Saturday night.

Spider is a creepy crawler

by Susan John
staff writer

Along Came a Spider is a suspenseful thriller full of many shocking twists and turns that keep you on the edge of your seat throughout the entire movie. Morgan Freeman makes a repeat performance starring as Dr. Alex Cross, his role from the 1997 film *Kiss the Girls*, a prequel to *Along Came a Spider*.

In the opening scene, Cross is the head of a sting operation and in the line of duty, tragically loses his partner. Eight months later, the daughter of a U.S. Senator is kidnapped from her school. Cross, who is still grieving the loss of his partner, is invited to join in the game by the kidnapper when he receives a phone call. This forces him get back on his feet.

At the crime scene, Cross meets the head of the secret service for the school, Jezi Flannigan (Monica Potter), who is still shaken up because she feels she let everyone down by letting the kidnapping occur. Jezi convinces the reluctant Cross to let her join him as a partner in solving the kidnapping case. Together the duo and the FBI try to piece together the intricate puzzle the kidnapper cleverly sets up.

Although I have not read the book, I enjoyed watching this movie. It kept me guessing the whole way through.

Enemy at the Gates explodes with plot and pageantry

by Mike Francis
staff writer

Explosions, gunshots, and people screaming during the ravages of war illustrate Russia's horrific side of a true story during World War II. *Enemy at the Gates* takes place in Stalingrad Russia, and tells the heroic story of one soldier/sniper, Vassili Zaitsev (Jude Law). His marksmanship, which was taught to him as a young boy, helped gain back soldiers morale in a war that was almost lost.

Vassili was an ordinary soldier with a special talent that helped him turn the war around. Soviet political officer, Danilov (Joseph Fiennes) sees the potential propaganda in Vassili and the opportunity to make a war-time hero. Vassili wins the hearts and minds of the Soviet soldiers, silently killing one German officer after another. This in turn, forces Germany to unleash its finest sharpshooter Major Konig (Ed Harris) to hunt down and crush the only hope that Vassili has placed in the hearts of the Soviets.

The two go on playing a game of cat and mouse with each other while a much larger war is being fought around them. The many misses between them build into a personal vendetta, with each soldier out-witting the other to come out on top.

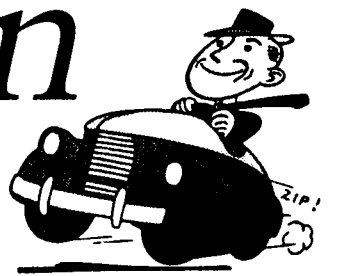
Word of Vassili's victories—with the help of Khrushchev (Bob Hoskins), sent by Stalin to personally oversee the Russian's military—is what turns the tide of the war in favor of the Soviets.

The rise of popularity that Danilov has given to Vassili, catches the eye of a courageous young woman Tania (Rachel Weisz), who volunteers to fight on the war front with Vassili. This puts tension on the friendship that has been built between Danilov and Vassili. Love, rage, pride, and deception develop as a different war wages between friends to win the warm heart of one woman in a cold and unforgiving city.

Aside from a good war story, the film's special effects are outstanding. Jude Law, Ed Harris and Rachel Weisz give exceptional performances, making *Enemy at the Gates* a must-see movie.

R'Erin To Go

by Erin McCarty



Jesus Christ is the weekend's biggest superstar

We have come once more to Good Friday, the culmination of Holy Week upon which Christians commemorate the death of Jesus and anticipate His resurrection. Many devout Christian students at Behrend spend the afternoon reflecting and attending church services, while others adopt the religion for the day in order to get out of class. But whether or not they embrace the idea of Jesus' divinity, the chances are very good that they have a pretty clear picture of who He was.

How can this be, even if they have never set foot inside a church or opened a Bible? Quite simply, the biblical account of Jesus' life has been hailed as *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, the name given to one of the most extravagant renderings of his history ever put on video. Hollywood loves a challenge, and what greater challenge could there be than to depict the Son of God in all His divine glory—or to present a simple carpenter replete with human failings, automatically alienating those who believe that Jesus was so much more?

The range of depictions of Jesus in film are as wide as the spectrum of individual opinions about Him. Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings* approached the gospel with all the glamour and drama of his Exodus epic, *The Ten Commandments*, and argued that the high priest alone was responsible for Jesus' death. The aforementioned *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) was even more elaborate, and the story itself was upstaged by the big names that appeared in bit parts throughout the leviathan film.

Steven Schwartz' *Godspell* and Johnny Cash's *The Gospel Road* both released in 1973, were musicals rooted in the counter-culture which attempted to make Jesus and his followers more easily identifiable with a modern audience by painting them as hippies. *Jesus Christ Superstar*, one of the most fervently protested yet perpetually popular shows ever to hit the stage, made its film debut in 1973 as well. With catchy music by Andrew Lloyd Webber and challenging lyrics by Tim Rice, the rock opera addressed the gospel from Judas' point of view, making Judas a representative of the authors themselves in their doubts about Jesus' divinity. *Superstar* never purported to provide any answers, but it asked many questions that Christians would rather not have to deal with.

If Webber and Rice put a rather cynical slant on the Passion narrative, they still remained primarily faithful to the text. What made their musical offensive to many, other than the sometimes risqué costumes and choreography, was the way they rounded out the main characters in the story, imagining what they may have been thinking at the time.

Other films were not so kosher. *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), directed by Martin Scorsese, showed Jesus marrying Mary Magdalene and abandoning the cross in order to engage in intercourse with her. While *Superstar* probed Mary's soul and depicted her as being torn with her feelings about Jesus, it never implied that Jesus harbored any feelings for her that were of a romantic nature. *Temptation* came right out and showed those feelings, and this radical departure has made it one of the most despised films ever made.

One play that never made it to the screen is *Corpus Christi*, which set the story of Jesus and his disciples in Corpus Christi, Texas, and portrayed them as being gay. Terrence McNally wrote the play as a tribute to Matthew Shepard, a young gay man who was killed as a result of his sexual orientation, and intended it to make a statement about the universal nature of God's love. "Jesus Christ did not die in vain because His disciples lived to spread His story. It is this generation's duty to make certain Matthew Shepard did not die in vain either," McNally explained.

Hollywood's fascination with Jesus has not dimmed, and just last year the mini-series *Jesus* arrived on CBS to much fanfare. I don't think that this is a bad thing. The truth is that there is much we do not know about Jesus, and attempts by movie makers to delve deeper into His life are simply a breeding ground for questions about the most influential man in our history. Films about him encourage Christians and non-Christians alike to be curious about Jesus and search their own souls for a more complete understanding of who He was and what He meant to the world.

New Releases

Movies

Kingdom Come
Josie and the Pussycats
Joe Dirt
4/13

Bridget Jones's Diary
4/17

Video*

Shanghai Noon
Dragon Ball Z

*Release Date: 4/17

Music*

Brooks & Dunn
Queer As Folk
Redman

DVD*

Bamboozled
Billy Elliot
Space Cowboys

Now that the weather's warming up, check out some live sports or catch the highlights on SportsCenter at almost any point during the week.