



Lawless Heart

Lawless Heart is the film equivalent of a beanbag chair or a shot of Southern Comfort. It is balm, it is release. It begins with the drowning death of Stuart, a restaurateur, whose partner Nick (Tom Hollander) left to tend to the business, is questioning his sexuality. Then there are Stuart and Nick's two friends, Dan (Bill Nighy), questioning his marriage, and Tim (Douglas Henshall), questioning his perpetual world travels, and you have a film that presents three radically different points of view in a seamless and swift scenario. It's *Rashomon*, lite.

We only know Stuart through the prism of his three friends, as different from one another as seasons. But it's the quirky performances, particularly from Nighy, Henshall and Sukie Smith, as Nick's potentially new paramour, that give the film its ballast and sail it safely to port.

The home movie sequence at *Lawless Heart's* end makes it as well-wrapped as a package from Martha By Mail. (RW)

P.S. Your Cat Is Dead

It's disconcerting to see '80s hunk Steve Guttenberg as a pathetic luckless actor/writer in his film adaptation of James Kirkwood's cult fave *P.S. Your Cat Is Dead*. But, Guttenberg, so dead-sexy in *Cocoon*, gives the shoddy schlub, Jimmy Zoole, a heart and you start pulling for him.

Cat, Guttenberg's commendable big-screen directorial debut, is about a man whose New Year's Eve is not dull at all. His girlfriend dumps him, he captures the gay burglar, Eddie, (the enjoyable Lombardo Boyar) who breaks into his apartment, and ties Eddie to the kitchen sink. Their exchanges over the course of the evening force Jimmy to reexamine many of the choices he has made in his life, including his sexuality.

Guttenberg's portrayal of Zoole will make you forget about *Police Academy*, (though he does channel some of Officer Mahoney in various slapstick moments). And Boyar, who is priceless on the *Bernie Mac Show* as Chuy, delivers his lines with precociousness, precision and humor.

But to resurrect a 1970s work that, because of the time it was written, played coy with the issue of homosexuality now when we've come so far, ultimately makes us pose the question "is that all there is?" when we expect more. (EA)

The Pianist

Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* tells the story of Wladyslaw Szpilman, a pianist on Polish radio, and a Jew, who survived the Nazi occupation of Warsaw, through luck, wits and the unexpected last minute help of a German officer. It is a story Polanski, a survivor of the Krakow ghetto, was born to tell. Filmed in Poland, Polanski charts the fate of Szpilman's family as they are forced from their home to the ghetto and eventually onto a train carrying them to a labor camp. Szpilman himself was saved at the last second, when a Jewish collaborator pulled him from the crowd and told him to run.

Polanski has always been a master at charting the inner journey of his characters with passion and laser-beam clarity; from *Rosemary's Baby* to *Chinatown*, his connection to his protagonists has a near autobiographical intensity. The same holds true watching Adrian Brody's star-making turn as Szpilman. From his first moment on screen, Brody, under Polanski's guidance, gives a performance that is all the more heroic for its humanity.

This is a powerful film, made more powerful because it is told strictly through the lens of Szpilman's experience. It is also Polanski's masterwork, and yet another chapter in a story we must never forget. (RW)

Standing in the Shadows of Motown

This musical documentary uses interviews and clips from recent performances to illustrate the undeniable contribution of a talented group of unsung heroes. At the very core of the Motown sound beats the heart of The Funk Brothers. Director, Paul Justman, attempts to give back some of the notoriety denied to these gifted musicians for decades.

These trailblazing virtuosos played on more Number 1 hits than anyone in the history of pop music. Featuring sensational covers of some past Motown songs by several of today's popular artists such as Joan Osborne, MeShell Ndegeocello and Chaka Khan, the film is a must-see for any Motown lover. *Standing* ultimately educates the public by revealing the hidden truth: In a tiny basement, in a small house, the Funk Brothers gave birth to Motown. (BB)

— Reviews by Eric Andersson,
A. Blair Boone and Richard Walsh