

Raise your glasses in lactoast to independent films

JAMES MATNEY
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CENTRAL VALLEY

This winter, there is a diverse buffet of movies for you to choose from.

Most people order the widely franchised cheeseburger because of its biggie-sized portion, its reliably adequate flavor, and its bright, attractive packaging.

Don't get me wrong; on opening day, I'll be sitting in the front row savoring the cheeseburgery deliciousness of "Quantum of Solace" and "Twilight."

But after the initial cinematic hunger subsides, the diner, like myself, who craves a heartier meal, will take a second trip through the buffet line and search for a meal with a more complex flavor and memorable substance.

Luckily, there are four films being released in the coming weeks that are sure to satisfy the taste buds of hungry moviegoers craving high quality, thought provoking motion pictures.

"Rachel Getting Married" – Now Playing

From Jonathan Demme, director of the Oscar-winning films "The Silence of the Lambs" and "Philadelphia," comes a sharply realistic story about a beautiful American family that is forced to deal with deeply repressed hostilities when its rebel, recovering drug addict daughter comes to visit for her sister's wedding.

Having recently seen the entire film, I can conclude that the film not only is cleverly written and possesses strong performances from its cast, but also stirs the emotions of the viewer with a kitchen whisk and is unapologetically raw in its realism.

Nevertheless, the film is hardly a tear jerking episode of "Oprah." In fact, the entire tone of the film sits on the line between light and heavy. It's neither reserved nor melodramatic. It's neither strict nor indulgent.

Anne Hathaway sheds her Disney princess tiara and "Devil Wears Prada" cuteness to play Kym, the rehab junkie with a jagged haircut and a spitefully sarcastic, R-rated tongue. Her performance is career-defining and her dialogue is delivered in such an effortlessly acerbic way that it becomes increasingly haunting.

On some level, I think every American family can relate to this film because I think every family has its own version of Kym. Every family has dealt with Kym, been hurt by Kym, and shared a laugh with Kym.

This film speaks loudly to the entire country and does so with a stripped, uninhibited voice.

"Milk" – Dec 5

"Milk" is a political biopic about Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official of California. The film delves into his personal life, his campaigns for gay rights, and the friction he encountered with Dan White, an intolerant political supervisor and rival elected official who goes on to assassinate Milk and

Mayor George Moscone in 1978.

The trailers show Oscar-winning actor Sean Penn portraying Milk with sensitivity and profundity and capturing his sense of humor and insecure foundation. This film, in addition to Penn's notable performance, is already receiving positive feedback from the critics and the trailer that I viewed promises a film that is both insightful and factual.

That is not to say that this film will be welcomed with open arms and kisses by millions of moviegoers. It does indeed have a gay protagonist, something that mainstream America hasn't had to deal with since the cowboys of "Brokeback Mountain." The film has also garnered an "R" rating, so there may even be a scene with two men kissing or even consummating, something millions of Americans regard as immoral sin.

Despite the controversy that this movie faces, I still urge those over 17 to go out and watch this film. The homosexual themes of "Milk" aren't what will make this film spectacular and isn't going to be a pervasive component of the film. The amazing performances, and highly researched script are what will make "Milk" one of the best films of the year.

In the midst of Proposition 8, the controversial measure recently passed in California that bans same-sex marriage, "Milk" is guaranteed to spark intelligent, opinionated conversation and masterfully shed light on a chapter of history that is unremittably absent in our textbooks.

"Doubt" – Dec 12

Based upon the Pulitzer-Prize-winning play, "Doubt" is a provocative-period drama set in the Bronx in 1964.

According to sneak previews, legendary actress Meryl Streep plays Sister Aloysius Beauvier, a stern, detached principal of a

disciplined catholic school. Conflict arises when a young novice suggests to Beauvier that the school's priest, Father Flynn, played by Oscar winning actor Phillip Seymour Hoffman, is sexually molesting Donald Miller, the school's first African American student.

With only her ethical, guilt ridden certainty and not a single piece of evidence, Beauvier initiates a quest to prove that Father Flynn is guilty, a quest that undyingly tarnishes her seemingly innocent community.

I strongly recommend this film mainly because of the guaranteed strong performances by the two lead actors, both of whom have won numerous accolades for their dramatic acting work.

Upon viewing the trailer, Streep's portrayal of the stolid, resentful nun is completely different than any of her previous work and Hoffman displays strong acting chops in portraying a poignant, charismatic character that is accused of a disgraceful crime.

The piercing way that this film addresses the boundaries of religion and the power of moralistic authority will bring both satisfaction and contemplation to the captivated viewer.

"Revolutionary Road" – Dec 26

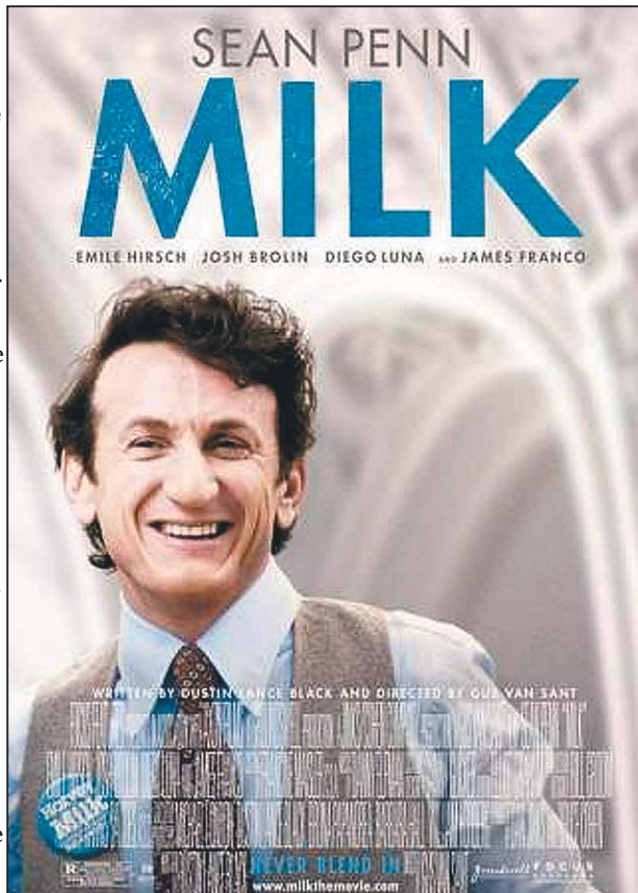
It seems like only yesterday that the unsinkable Titanic was on the ocean floor. Rose was staying afloat on that piece of broken door and Jack Dawson had kicked the bucket with his freezing dead hand still clasped in the palms of his star-crossed lover.

"Revolutionary Road" reunites the stars of 1997's "Titanic," Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet, and portrays them as a dysfunctional young couple in the 1950's who decide to move to the New England suburbs in hopes of achieving the American dream.

Basically, it's the alternate ending to "Titanic." But instead of Jack dying and Rose getting old and creepy, the two gorgeous lovers survive the boat ride to America, move to the suburbs, start a family and build a white picket fence, only to realize that they are both severely unhappy.

DiCaprio plays a depressed, unfaithful husband who detests his corporate job and abuses alcohol to alleviate his frustration and resentment toward his wife. Winslet plays an unhappy caretaker of the family's two young children and dreams of becoming an actress in Paris.

Buzz from the previews say the film is great in that it recaptures the winning on-screen chemistry between DiCaprio and Winslet but does so in a subtle, understated way in order to emphasize their character's struggles. Critics say the film accomplishes this without the heavy sappiness that, at times, weighed "Titanic" down.



Holidays offer many opportunities for giving back

MARY DOMBROWSKI
Staff Reporter
LEWIS AND CLARK

Regardless of what your religious affiliation may be, the holiday season is a time of happiness, joy and hope for humanity. If you don't feel that, you're probably not really getting what it's all about. That, or you're enough of a realist to have observed that the flip side of this holiday season has essentially become a retailer's heaven littered with false sentiments and tacky decorations.

Yet it didn't start out that way. Everything about the holidays that has been twisted into something selfish or ugly started out with the best of intentions. Religion was the basis for most holiday celebrations, which can hardly be described as less than genuine. Gifts were designed to show others how much they were loved. Decorations were a way to spread the cheer of the season.

One holiday tradition that embodies the true meaning of the season that has thankfully not gone by the wayside is that of volunteering. Here are a few ideas on how to give back this season.

The Tree of Sharing is an excellent way to give to those who may otherwise be financially unable to afford giving or receiving gifts or even necessities. Es-

entially you will receive a tag with a gift request on it, purchase the gift, and return it to the location. Many churches and other organizations sponsor a Tree of Sharing each year. North Town Mall, the Valley Mall and Riverpark Square also have tree locations at which you can donate.

As the weather gets colder, an increased demand is placed on food banks and shelters. These are present at many Spokane supermarkets, schools, and businesses. On December 13, Second Harvest is sponsoring a food drive at all Fred Meyers stores in Spokane and Coeur d'Alene. Sign up to volunteer on the website at www.2-harvest.org or make sure and drop off donations.

Fellow optimists agree there is hope that the sincerity of the season can and will be remembered. The best way to revive this spirit is to take the focus off of what you want this holiday season and instead to embrace others. Opportunities tend to be everywhere this time of year. Talk to school counselors, shelters, children's hospitals, or retirement homes. There is a wealth of good that one person can do in the world, especially during this time of year. Really, it shouldn't be hard to regain the spirit of giving the season brings. All it takes is looking past yourself at the needs of the world and the true meaning of the holidays.

Winter Arts Calendar

RACHEL PALMER
Staff Reporter
GONZAGA PREP

Spokane Poetry Slam
12/11/08 at the Empyrean
Cost: Free

The Nutcracker
Runs 12/5/08 to 12/7/08 at the INB Performing Arts Center.
Cost: \$14-\$37

First Night Spokane
12/31/08 at 7 p.m.
Cost: \$12

A Christmas Carol, The Musical
Runs 12/4/08 to 12/7/08 at the Spokane Civic Theatre.

Journey to the North Pole
Light cruises on the Coeur d'Alene Lake from 11/27/08 to 1/3/09.
Cost: \$15.75 and free for 12 & under

Free Carriage Rides in Coeur d'Alene
Runs 12/6/08 to 12/7/08

Ice Skating At Riverfront Park
Runs Mondays-Thursdays, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. and 7-8:30 p.m.; Fridays, Saturdays and nights before holidays, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. and 7-10 p.m.; Sundays, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
Cost: \$4.25/adults; \$3.25/children ages 3-17 seniors and military; \$3/skate rental

The Color Purple
Runs 12/10/08 to 12/12/08 at the INB Performing Arts Center.

Madeline's Christmas
12/13/08 presented by Spokane Children's theatre at Spokane Community College.
Cost: \$10 for adults \$8 for 18 and younger

Hockey game Gonzaga vs. University of Idaho
At Eagle's Ice Arena 12/12/08
Cost: Free

Coeur d'Alene Lights
From the 11/27/08 to 1/3/09

Sounds of Christmas
12/6/08 to 12/7/08 at 2 p.m. North Idaho College
Cost: Free

The VOX's 2008 year-end music review

JORDAN SATTERFIELD
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FERRIS

10. "You & Me" by The Walkmen (Gigantic)

If there's one indie rock band to keep your eye on, make it New York City's The Walkmen. If you are intrigued by late '50s and early '60s pop music, you will likely find a great wealth of tunes in The Walkmen's fifth studio LP, "You & Me."

Back from a track-by-track covers album of Harry Nilsson's "Pussy Cats," The Walkmen are sporting fourteen originals, boasting the expected booming bass melodies and biting guitar. I'll be damned if "In the New Year" isn't the best song I've heard all year.

9. "Saint Dymphna" by Gang Gang Dance (The Social Registry)

Those annoyed by Middle Eastern pop music read no further, but Gang Gang Dance's years of droning experimentation have finally ceased, and the Gang Gang gang has finally created the epitome of their work, "Saint Dymphna." The group's first all-over "pop" album, "Dymphna" is the most effective blend of their unique influences yet. Glittering electronic rock with a hint of Morrissey and a Middle Eastern pop twinge, "Saint Dymphna" is an album you can't afford to miss. If you can find it, that is.

8. "Microcastle" by Deerhunter (Kranky)

"Microcastle" sees Bradford Cox and company opting out of building on the ambient fuzz of their second LP, "Cryptograms," and instead going for the more accessible side of their sound. What could have turned out to be a boring train-wreck ended up being a slightly less creative but just as enjoyable focus on "Cryptograms" more sing-along moments. Regardless, you'd better believe Deerhunter has guaranteed a spot in the best albums of 2008 along with "Microcastle."

7. "In Ghost Colours" by Cut Copy (Modular)

Equal parts Daft Punk, New Order and Roxy Music, Cut Copy's

kaleidoscopic synth-pop shimmers like never before on "In Ghost Colours," the group's second album. A painfully nostalgic hark back the best electronic pop of the mid-to-late 80s (hello, Depeche Mode!), Cut Copy has defeated the sophomore slump elegantly by minimally evolving their sound, remembering to stay true to what previous fans expected. "Ghost Colours" is neither original nor shockingly expansive, but it's easily the most carelessly enjoyable album to come out of 2008.

6. "The Bedlam In Goliath" by The Mars Volta (Universal)

Back again with a new concept about an evil Ouija and a bizarre love triangle, The Volta has never been so focused on making a consistent rock album than we see them on "Bedlam." Instead of following suit with their previous releases, here they abandon the random sporadic bursts of energy they were so good at frightening and exciting us all with. They replace such ideals with forming their most intense album to date, a 75 minute explosion of rushing time signatures and face-smothering guitar riffs.

5. "Dig, Lazarus, Dig!!!" by Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds (ANTI-)

Infamously avant-garde rocker Nick Cave turns back to his roots to produce one of his most atypically straightforward releases in years (which is saying a lot, keeping in mind the fact that the man's been releasing music since 1977). Not in any sense, however, does that mean he's ready to calm down. The punk aspects of Cave's otherwise 60s drug/psychedelic rock influences are alive and kicking, and he and The Bad Seeds seem overjoyed to prove it to us.

4. "Fleet Foxes" by Fleet Foxes (Sub Pop)

Can someone say, "Beach Boys?" Seattle's Fleet Foxes have delivered one of the best debut releases in years, and such a timeless folk rock record it is. At once a chilling cold and soothing warmth, Fleet Foxes' Southern-with-a-twist classical folk melodies are the perfect place to gently lay their deep and dreamy harmonies. Aside from all of that, Fleet Foxes deserve credit enough for the brilliant application of hymnals that flood this album. Who else can makes hymns ROCK?

3. "Third" by Portishead (Mercury)

In the middle of the 1990s, Portishead was the pinnacle of trip-hop. And considering the reputation garnered by their first two masterpieces, the mere fact that a band with a high caliber such as Portishead took eleven years to finally record their third album is sure to get some hopes up. Why would they want to disappoint us? Portishead is clearly at the top of their game on the appropriately titled "Third," embracing more electronics than ever, keeping the samples coming, and even picking up the acoustic guitar and a banjo!

2. "Nouns" by No Age (Sub Pop)

Some like their punk rock fast, angry, and simple. Others will more likely appreciate No Age's signature punk formula, complete with the occasional electronic sample, squelching feedback, and a White Stripes-esque bassless lineup. With a broad range of unique sounds at their disposal (try "folk punk" on for size) and a clear unifying sense of garage rock in everything they present, No Age's second full-length "Nouns" is far more than just one cut above the rest.

1. "Dear Science" by TV on the Radio (Interscope)

Experimental rock group TV on the Radio releases a new album every couple of years. These albums have become big events, everyone excited to get their minds blown by TVOTR's diverse and original sound. "Dear Science," the most recent of such events, is easily the best one to measure. Their seemingly unstoppable "Return to Cookie Mountain" sounds like child's play compared to "Dear Science's" irresistible hooks and focused nature, showing that Adebimpe, Sitek, and the rest of the crew have their heads firmly fastened and on straight.

Not a bad track out of the whole group, "Dear Science" is a wonderful narration of what more music needs to be nowadays; it's consistent, focused, bold and shockingly dense with ideas not wasted on frivolities like Auto-Tune (I'm talking to you, Lil Wayne) or aimless experiments. Most importantly, it's increasingly enjoyable with every listen, possibly proving that TV on the Radio may have just released one of those mythical "timeless" albums that influence everyone and change music as we know it. I guess only time will tell whether or not the prophecy is to be believed.