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## **Dualities** abound in spring

MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN THE WASHINGTON POST

Good and evil, love and hate these are perennial themes of cinema. But this spring, the dualities seem sharper, at times with literal on-screen twinning. Robert De Niro ("The Alto Knights") and Michael B. Jordan ("Sinners") are each playing double roles.

Then there's the double helix of existence itself, threaded through the fabric of several forthcoming movies: not just life and death, but undeath, if you will.

From ghosts and vampires to reincarnation and a sleeplike death — I'm looking at you, "Snow White" — the idea of something beyond the grave, or maybe between this world and the next, pops up again and again. Characters that take a licking and keep on ticking are there too, in "Novocaine" and "Mission: Impossible The Final Reckoning.

That last one is arguably the apotheosis of this idea. As hinted at in the film's subtitle, and a line spoken by Tom Cruise's character in the trailer — "I need you to trust me — one last time" — this could be the last hurrah for a franchise and a character that just won't die.

Opening dates are subject to change.

#### 'My Dead Friend Zoe'

Sonequa Martin-Green plays an Afghanistan war veteran whose grief over the death of a platoon mate (Natalie Morales) is made palpable by her late friend's haunting presence. The feature directorial debut of Kyle Hausmann-Stokes, the dark dramedy was inspired by the filmmaker's own experience of loss while serving as a paratrooper in Iraq. Also with Morgan Freeman and Ed Harris. In theaters now.

"Parasite" writer-director Bong Joon-ho adapts a 2022 sci-fi novel by Edward Ashton about Mickey Barnes (Robert Pattinson), a space colonist whose high-risk job as an "expendable" causes him to experience his own gruesome death, over and over again. After each demise, a fresh copy of Mickey's body is 3D-printed, with all his memories intact until, by mistake, two versions of him unwittingly come face-to-face with each other.

'Black Bag' Fresh off their ghost story "Presence," filmmaker Steven Soderbergh and writer David Koepp return to the tone they set with 2022's cyber-thriller "Kimi." The new film revolves around married American spooks (Michael Fassbender and Cate Blanchett) who become cat and mouse when the wife is suspected of betraying the nation, with potentially violent consequences, and her husband is assigned to terminate her rogue mission. March 14.

#### 'Novocaine

Jack Quaid ("The Boys") plays Nathan Caine, an average Joe with a congenital insensitivity to pain (yes, it's a real thing). When his girlfriend (Amber Midthunder) is taken hostage, Nathan attempts to take on the bad guys himself. That and a quippy screenplay position him in superhero territory. Hellooo, Deadpool. March 14.

#### 'Snow White'

Disney continues its string of

See SPRING on Page 6E

#### POPNOTES/COLUMN



Jake-ann Jones stars as Cece in Bridgett Davis' "Naked Acts." The 1992 film has been digitally restored and remastered by Lightbox Film Center at University of the Arts (Philadelphia) in collaboration with Milestone Film, with support from Ron and Suzanne Naples.

# Saved from obscurity

# 'Naked Acts' an excellent example of Independent Black cinema



hen you think about American Black cinema, it's not just the blockbusters or critical darlings that define its legacy — it's also the overlooked, the underfunded, and the nearly forgotten. For every "Do the Right Thing" or "Moonlight," there's a "Killer of Sheep" or a "Daughters of the Dust," films that nearly slipped through the cracks, to be rediscovered years later as essential works of Black storytelling.

The latest rediscovery is Bridgett M. Davis' "Naked Acts" (1996), an introspective exploration of Black female identity, self-image and sexuality. Initially met with little fanfare, it now

stands among many underappreciated films that challenge industry norms and expand the scope of what Black cinema can be.

While "Killer of Sheep" was prevented from having a real theatrical release in 1978 by music issue clearance issues — director Charles Burnett did not secure clearances for his soundtrack music because he was a graduate student at UCLA, and "Killer of Sheep" was essentially his thesis film. He didn't envision the movie being shown outside an academic setting, and even if he had obtained proper licensing for songs from artists such Dinah Washington, Paul Robeson and Earth, Wind & Fire, using them would have been prohibitively expensive.

On the other hand, Julie Dash's "Daughters of the Dust" (1991) was the first feature directed by a Black woman to get a theatrical release in the U.S. But its poetic structure and lack of a traditional narrative made it difficult for Hollywood to market, and it only emerged from relative obscurity after Beyoncé alluded to its experimental storytelling in her video

album "Lemonade" (2016). One could program a fine film series featuring movies by Black creators that only found purchase in the culture after years of lying fallow: In addition to "Killer of Sheep" and "Daughters in the Dust," one could program Cher-

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#### FILM SCENE/OPINION

## Experimental filmmaker brings show to Spa city



Experimental filmmaker Roger Beebe brought his experimental film show to Hot Springs for the Arkansas School of Math, Science and the Arts. It featured several 16 mm projectors.

(Special to the Democrat-Gazette/Al Topich)

SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

When it comes to movies, I think I've seen just about everything the medium has to offer. I've seen nearly 6,000 films. I've seen features, shorts, experimental cinema. I've seen bands perform a concert while a film plays in the background. I've seen movies screen while people give lectures over the moving images. I thought I had experienced every possible configuration of sight and sound on celluloid. Or so I thought. Recently, I went to a film screening in Hot Springs and was gobsmacked by what I witnessed. And I'm still having difficulty processing it.

Last month, the Arkansas

School for Mathematics, Sciences, and the Arts (ASMSA) in Hot Springs invited experimental filmmaker Roger Beebe to perform his traveling 16 mm, multi-projector showcase. The event was sponsored by the school'sart department and hosted by Dan Anderson, a digital arts instructor at the school. Anderson teaches an array of media classes, ranging from film and photography to graphic design. He even lets his students get somewhat experimental by letting them shoot on Super 8 movie cameras.

Anderson explains how this event, which was free to the pub-

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#### **EXHIBIT/OPINION**

## 'Rivera's Paris' shows his, compatriots' works abroad

SEAN CLANCY ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

"Rivera's Paris," the new exhibit at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, does a remarkable job of telling the story of the time when Diego Rivera was laying the groundwork that would turn him into a star and one of Mexico's most beloved artists.

The exhibit places works by Rivera in conversation with pieces by his friends Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani and Tsuguharu Foujita. There are also works by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, Paul Cézanne, Dario de Regoyos and others who were influential in Rivera's development.

### "Rivera's Paris"

When: Through May 18 Where: Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, 501 East Ninth St.,

Hours: Tuesday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Wednesday-Friday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m; Sunday, noon-5 p.m. **Admission:** Free

(501) 372-4000 arkmfa.org

The show, assembled with works from the museum's stash along with those on loan from 12 other museums and private collections, features 45 paintings, drawings and a few photographs. The centerpiece is "Dos Mujeres (Two Women)," the 1914 cubist masterpiece Rivera painted while living in Paris. It was donated to the museum 70 years ago by Abby Rockefeller Mauzé, daughter of John D. Rockefeller Jr., and sister to future Arkansas Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller. The painting, one of 13 works by Rivera in the show, has been a jewel in the museum's crown ever since.

"Rivera's Paris" brings the viewer into the fertile world the ambitious Rivera encountered

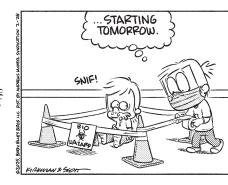
Installation view of "Rivera's Paris" at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts," which is on display through May 18. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Sean Clancy)

See ART on Page 3E

#### **Baby Blues**





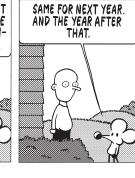


Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

**Pearls Before Swine** 

# HI, NEIGHBOR BOB... I JUST CAME BY TO SAY I WON'T BE ABLE TO GIVE YOU A BIRTH-DAY PRESENT THIS YEAR.

I'D LIKE TO IMBIBE A REFRESHING COCKTAIL IN YOUR PRESENCE.

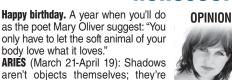








#### HOROSCOPES BY HOLIDAY



**HOLIDAY** MATHIS

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Consistency doesn't have to mean perfection or intensity. Adjust to solve the problem at hand. Flip the rigid "grind-it-out" mindset and think in more fluid and forgiving terms. Emphasize adaptability. **GEMINI** (May 21-June 21): The logical options presented to you each have merit, to the extent that none is better than the last, only different. Let this free you. It doesn't matter what you choose today; it only matters that you do. CANCER (June 22-July 22): You'll have the challenge that excites your mind and engages your heart, pulling out your best ideas and sharpest instincts. The satisfaction will come not just from succeeding but from knowing you're working in harmony with your unique strengths. LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): The same words delivered with

body love what it loves."

evidence of what exists. You can't change a shadow by shifting it, only

by moving the light or the matter. To-

day, you'll bring clarity by focusing on what is, not the illusion it creates.

warmth and sincerity can build bridges, but spoken with coldness or impatience, they can burn them. Your tone, pacing and presence have the power to make a simple message feel like an invitation or a dismissal. VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): What you want to create or

accomplish may feel out of reach, especially with your fi-

nancial constraints. But fresh creative influences will shift your perspective, revealing a new approach.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23): You're not someone who coasts on easy contentment, and that's OK. Happiness isn't always the goal. You feel things deeply. You care. It doesn't

exactly feel buoyant, but it's a valid way of being. SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21): What matters is the task at hand. Finish what you need to finish. It doesn't have to happen perfectly or beautifully, but it has to happen. Breathe and take the next small step. You don't have to

solve everything, just this one thing. SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): One moment isn't the whole story. You might be stressed for a beat, but there are many more beats in the song. If you're the stressed person, you're also the person who dreams, who loves deeply, who pushes forward even when it's hard.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Sometimes it seems like

only you know how to best serve. Those close may not be aware of the nuances you deliver for maximum comfort and support. The pride you take in caregiving is one of the many wonderful things about you. AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Sometimes you have the

stuff first and you look for the right container to keep it in. Today the container will come first. The empty box, the blank page ... decide how to fill it before the world decides for you.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): The world offers itself to your imagination. Your inner world is a place where you can make anything happen. As for the other realities that are harder to change, take charge where you can, and while you're at it, customize it to you. Why shouldn't it be?

#### **Arkansas postcard past** By Ray Hanley

Jonesboro, circa 1900: John W. Roy built his dry goods and grocery store in front of the railroad tracks in Nettleton outside Jonesboro. Roy was born in 1856 and died in 1925. Today, Nettleton is part of Jonesboro.

Send questions or comments to Arkansas Postcard Past, P.O. Box 2221, Little Rock, AR 72203



## **Notes**

Dustin

Continued from Page 1E

yl Dunye's "The Watermelon Woman" (1996), about a Black lesbian filmmaker researching a forgotten Black actress; Bill Gunn's 1973 avant-garde horror film "Ganja & Hess," remade by Spike Lee as "Da Sweet Blood of Jesus" in 2014; Melvin Van Peebles' political Blaxploitation film "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song" (1971); Leslie Harris' feature about a young woman navigating life in Brooklyn, "Just Another Girl on the I.R.T." (1992); Marlon Rigg's fierce documentary about Black gay identity "Tongues Untied" (1989) and Kathleen Collins' semi-autobiographical "Losing Ground" (1982), about a philosophy professor unhappily married to a struggling (and maybe second-rate) painter (not coincidentally, Gunn, the playwright, novelist, screenwriter, actor and filmmaker, who was one of the most important and most overlooked figures in Black cinema) who becomes entangled with an actor/theologian she meets while while researching a paper on aes-

etic experiences. Like Collins, Davis is an academic, and when she first conceived of "Naked Acts" in the early '90s, she took Collins' film as an inspiration, as she set out to craft a film from the perspective of a middle class, intellectual Black woman. Both films center on a Black woman's gaze — that is, they aren't about how others see Black women, but about how Black women see themselves. Sara, the protagonist of "Losing Ground," grapples with existential questions about pleasure and passion.

Cece (Jake-ann Jones) in "Naked Acts" is a film actress, navigating her relationship with her body and the pressures of the film industry. She is the daughter of former Blaxploitation star Lydia Love (Patricia DeArcy) and the granddaughter of a revered theatre actress (Maranantha Quick). She has been estranged from her mother for years, burdened by childhood trauma and body image struggles. The film begins as Cece with confronting Lydia about their past, attempting to reconcile years of pain and neglect. Meanwhile, Cece is set to make her acting debut in an ultra-low-budget independent film, marking her somewhat reluctant entry into the family tradition.

Her anxieties increase as she's forced to deal with the domineering producer Marcel (John McKie), and her onagain, off-again boyfriend Joel (Ron Cephas Jones), a stage director who is also making his debut as a film director. The film within the film is about a Black male artist and his female models. Cece plays one of the models and the script requires her to pose nude, something she is deeply uncomfortable with. Her body image issues are complicated by the fact she has recently lost 57 pounds.

Still, instead of walking away from the production, Cece attempts to negotiate



Jake-ann Jones is Cece and Ron Cephas Jones is Joel in Bridgett Davis' "Naked Acts." The 1992 film has been digitally restored and remastered by Lightbox Film Center at University of the Arts (Philadelphia) in collaboration with Milestone Film, with support from Ron and Suzanne Naples.

her boundaries, revealing more significant questions about agency, exploitation

and artistic power dynamics. Having recently lost 57 pounds, Cece hopes for newfound confidence, only to discover that her more profound struggle is not with her apothers seek to exert over her

Like "Losing Ground," "Naked Acts" is a naturalistic movie that operates on a symbolic level, with dialogue that occasionally runs to emphatic declarations and each major character representing a **rand** archetype. Cece's family history is steeped in generational conflict over Black artistry and respectability. Her grandmother disapproved of Lydia's sexually provocative roles, insisting on artistic "integrity" as a counter to racist stereotypes. Free-thinking Lydia rejected those constraints, seeing the demand for "respectability' as just another form of oppression.

This ideological clash has left Cece with a fractured sense of self. In one pivotal flashback, a young Cece, having been taken from her grandmother's care, is sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend. This event deepens her unease with her body and its representation.

Meanwhile the film's male characters reinforce themes of exploitation and control. Cece's father is absent; her abuser is a reminder of past trauma; Marcel is an authoritarian, using his power as a producer to manipulate Cece's vulnerability; while Joel, despite his artistic intentions, still expects his girl Cece to submit to his vision. Each man, in his own way, seeks to define her, mold her, possess her — forcing Cece into a battle over who gets to control the narrative of her body and identity. As she fights to reclaim herself, we see the weight of history pressing against her, the suffocating lineage of men and expectations that have dictated her life.

It is in this confrontation between self-possession and submission, between past trauma and future possibility — that Cece pushes back, questioning whether di-

rectors and actresses function

under the same hierarchical dynamic.

A turning point in Cece's journey is her friendship with Diana (Renee Cox), a feminist photographer hired to take stills for movie. Diana introduces Cece to a new way of thinking about reppearance but with the control resentation — one rooted in collaboration and empowerment rather than objectification. Cece initially balks at Diana's seminude portraits of Black women, but through their conversations, she begins to reclaim agency over her body and its image. Diana's statement, "The camera knows when you're faking it," resonates deeply with Cece, prompting her to rethink her role in the film and the broad-

er context of her life. 'Naked Acts" is ultimately about self-definition in a world that seeks to impose identities on Black women. Cece's journey is one of reclaiming ownership — not just over her body, but over her story. Davis, one of the few Black female filmmakers of her time, uses Cece's narrative to advocate for a cinema where Black women control their representation. The film's meta-commentary on power, image-making, and agency remains strikingly relevant today, making "Naked Acts" a pioneering work in

independent Black cinema. And it went virtually unseen when it was released. The movie industry's narrow view of what Black films could be - favoring narratives that catered to white audiences or aligned with commercial trends — kept Davis from securing distribution. So she distributed the film herself, ensuring it reached audiences through alternate channels. It played festivals, had a brief theatrical run, and then disappeared, a casualty of a system uninterested in preserving Black women's artistic contributions. So this layered, introspec-

tive examination of body image, artistic agency and the politics of representation, was almost lost to history — until now. Last year, "Naked Acts' has truly had a second life: a theatrical run in 25 U.S. cities including New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, and a dozen screenings in festivals and venues throughout Eu-

rope and Canada. Thanks to

the efforts of Milestone Film and Video in collaboration with Kino Lorber, "Naked Acts" was released on DVD

and Blu-Ray on Feb. 18. The rediscovery and restoration of "Naked Acts" speaks to a the shift in how Black cinema is valued. Milestone Film and Video, co-founded by Dennis Doros and Amv Heller, has a long history of rescuing marginalized films from oblivion. Their work in restoring and distributing classics like Burnett's "Killer of Sheep" and Kent Mackenzie's "The Exiles" demonstrates their commitment to expanding the cinematic canon beyond the narrow confines of Hollywood's dominant narratives. Their collaboration with Kino Lorber, another powerhouse in independent film distribution, has made "Naked Acts" accessible to a new generation of viewers who may never have had the chance to experience its brilliance.

"Naked Acts" is available in the usual places, and here: kinolorber.com/product/naked-acts-1).

The rediscovery of "Naked Acts" is more than just a long-overdue recognition of Davis' work — it's a testament to the resilience of Black female filmmakers who have been overlooked, underfunded, and yet still persist. Like "Losing Ground," "Daughters of the Dust," and "Killer of Sheep," "Naked Acts" was nearly lost to history, its absence a reminder of how many stories have been silenced by an industry that dictates which narratives deserve preservation. But not all great films are

rediscovered. Some remain lost, their reels gathering dust in forgotten archives, their voices unheard. The fact that 'Naked Acts" has resurfaced speaks to a shift in how we value Black cinema, but it also serves as a reminder of the many films that may never get a second chance. The work of rescuing and amplifying these films is far from over, and if history has taught us anything, it's that we cannot wait for the industry to recognize

their worth — sometimes we

have to do it ourselves.

pmartin@adgnewsroom.com

#### Continued from Page 1E

Art

when he left Mexico for Europe, enthralled by the modernist works of Cézanne and encouraged by Gerardo Murillo, his teacher at Academia San Carlos in Mexico City, who had returned from Europe with reports of the groundbreaking art being made there.

Rivera traveled to Spain for the first time in 1907, and Spain is where "Rivera's Parbegins.

The show opens with a bang as viewers are greeted first by two large, eye-popping paintings by Spanish artists. On the left is "Girls of Burriana (Falleras)," a grand oil on canvas from 1910-1911 by Hermengildo Anglada Camarasa that shows three otherworldly, colorfully dressed women and an elaborately adorned horse.

On the right is Ignacio Zuloaga y Zabaleta's stunning "Lucienne Bréval as Carmen" from 1908, which shows the opera singer Bréval smiling in a magnificently embroidered shawl. It's the kind of large, figurative painting that can stop someone in their tracks.

Also included is Sorolla's "The Blind Man of Toledo," in which the Spanish master captures the light and landscape with loose, beautifully

made brushstrokes. Cézanne, the influential French impressionist (Picasso called him "the father of us all") who died three years before Rivera's trip to Europe, was a guiding light for the young artist. There's a story told in one of the texts accompanying the exhibit of Rivera, who arrived in Paris in 1909, standing transfixed in the rain outside a gallery at the sight of several Cézanne paintings in the window.

Cézanne is duly represented by four pieces here, including "Farm at Montgeroult" from 1898 and the leafy, light "Undergrowth," both of which should be familiar to regular visitors to the museum; and the sparse, abstract watercolor "Rock Profile Near the Caves Above Château Noir." There are several graphite

drawings by Rivera, including his 1918 portrait of poet, novelist and filmmaker Jean Cocteau, who Rivera befriended while he and his common-law wife and fellow artist Angelina Beloff visited friends in a village on the Atlantic coast of France. "Montserrat," a bright,

pointillist landscape from 1911, is a good example of how Rivera was exploring with paint as he sought his own style. By 1913, he had embraced

cubism, and the groundbreaking movement is a crucial part of the exhibit. Rivera's pal Picasso is syn-

onymous with cubism, and the show includes the Spaniard's moody, earthy-toned "Man with a Pipe." There is also Jean Metzinger's blocky "Cubist Landscape," and a hat-tip to the curators for including Beloff's fun, colorful 'Still Life with Bottle."

Rivera also tackled still



"Dos Mujeres" ("Two Women"), a 1914 Cubist oil-on-canvas painting by Diego Rivera, is spotlighted in "Rivera's Paris," a current exhibit at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts. (Special to the Democrat-Ga-

zette/Arkansas Museum of Fine lifes in cubist form, including "Still Life, Mallorca" and "Still

Life with Bread Knife," which both have an almost textile appearance even though they are done in oil. "Dos Mujeres," of course,

is the exhibit's focal point. In it, Rivera depicts Beloff, who is standing, and their friend Alma Dolores Bastián, a fellow artist who lived with her husband in the same building as Beloff and Rivera in Paris and who is shown seated with a book in hand.

You're likely familiar with the painting if you've ever visited the museum. Seeing it in this context, however, invites a closer look. There is a dog at the bottom and the Parisian cityscape can be seen in the background. Rivera's use of planes, sharp lines, angles and color is mesmerizing.

By late 1920, Rivera left Paris and returned to Mexico. He became famous for his murals and was married, twice, to artist Frida Kahlo, whose star has probably eclipsed his in recent years (the tagline for the new exhibit is: "Before fame and Frida, there was Paris"). A sub-narrative of the exhibit is Rivera's relationship to the Rockefellers, and the importance of the donation 70 years ago of "Dos Mujeres."

The decision to spotlight that painting, along with the assemblage of early works by Rivera and pieces by his cohort and influences, have resulted in an informative and rewarding exhibit, one that connects Arkansas, the museum and the early, formative years of one the 20th century's most important artists.

Arkansas Democrat Tag Gazette

#### Style

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#### TY BURR

THE WASHINGTON POST "Cleaner" is a "Die Hard" knockoff with just enough fresh elements to make it watchable on a slow streaming night. Chief among those elements are Daisy Ridley in the classic John McClane role — nice to see high-rise terrorists outfoxed by an average Jane for a change - and some effective head games as to where the audience should place its sympathies. It's meat-and-potatoes stuff (well, we're in London, so bangers and mash), but you could do worse — and probably have.

Ridley, who played Rey in the last Star Wars trilogy, is all gumption and capability as Joanna "Joey" Locke, an ex-British Army soldier turned window cleaner at the skyscraper headquarters of Agnius Energy, a supposedly eco-friendly corporation that

Cast: Daisy Ridley, Clive Owen, Ruth Gemmell, Ray Fearon, Taz Skylar, Howard Charles, Matthew Tuck, Lee Boardman, Rufus Jones **Director:** Martin Campbell **Rating:** R for violence, language and brief drug use Running time: 1 hour, 37 minutes

is anything but. The formulaic script by Matthew Orton, Simon Uttley and Paul Andrew Williams takes a while to even establish that much, as we're treated to a glimpse of Joey's abusive upbringing and her stressed-out concern for autistic older brother Michael (Matthew Tuck), whose hacking skills have gotten him kicked out of multiple care facilities. Hmm, I wonder if they'll come in handy later in the movie?

Michael's latest ouster

capitalism. For example, the

incorporate environmental themes — even those that appear more abstract, with flashing lights and colors, like stars and nebulae projected on the screen. I asked Beebe how he would describe experimental films and how he made the decision to use multiple projectors.

"For me, experimental film means you should learn how to watch the film while watching it. They should be inventing new rules, almost like scientific experimentation. In 2007, I did my first big solo tour. I was on the road for three months, driving from Florida to Canada and back. On that tour, I had a positive and negative print of one of my films. I also had two projectors, one for getting the next film ready. And I wondered what would happen if I ended my show by showing both of them. And I was blown away by the results. It was like a poor man's CinemaScope."

By the end of the night, was thoroughly impressed that I was able to experience cinema in a new and invigorating way. I asked Anderson why he thinks these experimental films are important for students to see.

dents and the community aren't going to be able to see on Netflix. And with Roger's multiple projectors, it's something that you can't fully absorb or appreciate on the internet."

In the age of 60-second TikTok videos and the emptv-calorie "content" that plagues YouTube and Facebook, it's nice to know that there's at least a small niche group of people who can appreciate cinema as a boundless art form that still has room to grow and evolve in new wonderfully weird ways.

'The nice thing about experimental film is that you can't make any money. It keeps you honest, which is why there's a lot of peer-topeer sharing and generosity in the community. We're all just doing this because we love it," Beebe said.



Filmmaker Roger Beebe, who teaches at Ohio State University, talks show with Arkansas School for Math, Science and the Arts. (Special to the Democrat-Gazette/Al Topich)

### REVIEW/OPINION 'Cleaner'



Joey (Daisy Ridley) plays an ex-soldier turned window cleaner who tries to rescue 300 hostages in "Cleaner." (Quiver Distribution)

means he has to accompany Joey to work on the same evening that a glittering Agnius gala is invaded by eco-activists determined to air the company's very dirty laundry. The group's leader, Marcus, is played by Clive Owen with

MARK MESZOROS

THE NEWS-HERALD (TNS)

for an encore?

on a true story.

What would Jon Gunn do

The filmmaker's latest

work, "The Unbreakable

Boy," arrives in theaters al-

most a year to the day after

his previous directorial ef-

fort, the highly emotionally

satisfying "Ordinary Angels."

duced by Kingdom Story

Co., a Lionsgate partner spe-

cializing in Christian-based

projects, and both are based

Like "Ordinary Angels,"

The Unbreakable Boy" has

its share of heartwarming

and tough moments. How-

ever, the story inspiring the

new tale isn't quite as com-

pelling, and, unlike "Ordinary Angels," "The Unbreakable Boy" doesn't boast an

actor as talented as Academy

Award-winner Hilary Swank.

engaging, thanks largely to

Gunn's touch and solid per-

"The Unbreakable Boy: A

Father's Fear, a Son's Cour-

age, and a Story of Uncon-

ditional Love," co-written by

Scott LeRette and bestselling

author Susy Flory, the movie

sees "Shazam!" star Zachary

Levi portraying the movie

he has a simple life. He has

a good job in the medical

supply business and hangs

out with his best friend, Joe

(Drew Powell). Well, OK

Joe is the imaginary friend

Scott's had since childhood

and to whom he talks con-

stantly, but who are we to

clothes with, um, Joe, Scott

becomes taken with store

employee Teresa (Meghann

Fahy) and her incredible

blue eyes. They go on three

dates, she gets pregnant and,

suddenly, Scott's life is no

born — Joe is in the delivery

room with Scott for the oc-

casion and passes out during

the birth, a moment that

you'd expect to come off as

too silly but somehow works

as orchestrated by Gunn -

he is diagnosed with a ge-

netic condition that Teresa

has, osteogenesis imperfecta,

which causes her bones to

break easily and keeps her

After their son, Austin, is

longer simple.

One day shopping for

When we meet Scott,

version of LeRette.

iudge?

formances from its cast.

That said, "Boy" is largely

Based on the 2014 book

Both movies were pro-

more than a smidgen of Alan Rickman's Eurotrash hauteur in "Die Hard" but also with an agenda that crosses a viewer's wires. Marcus isn't above taking hostages to prove his point, but he's strictly anti-murder, and the

two brother CEOs of Agnius, mell), the two bonding over Gerald and Geoffrey Milton (Lee Boardman and Rufus Jones), are porcine environmental criminals with blood on their own hands. So, who's the bad guy here?

Without spoiling too much, others in Marcus' crew feel a different approach is in order, and "Cleaner" eventually reveals the genre's contractually obligated psycho mastermind Noah (Taz Skylar) before proceeding to crank up the suspense. As well as the suspension, since Joey is stuck outside the building on a cleaning stage dangling by a single cable for the first half of the movie. Director Martin Campbell ("Casino Royale"), a busy British journeyman, keeps it all moving and works up a nice, weary walkie-talkie alliance between Joey and detective Claire Hume (Ruth Gemthe wreckage of their personal lives as much as attending to the situation at hand.

Outside of a few late-inning fight scenes, Ridley earns her action-movie spurs without a lot of actual action, but she's resolute of spirit and firm of jaw, and it's easy to cheer Joey on as she jumps the preprogrammed hurdles of this subgenre. And if nothing else, "Cleaner" is interestingly conflicted about where its sympathies lie. Watching a video of the chief villain proclaiming that "we're watching the Earth die beneath our very feet while we do nothing about it," Michael — this movie's version of the wise fool — turns to his sister in confusion. "I don't understand," he says. "It's the truth." John McClane had it easy by comparison.

## Scene

• Continued from Page 1E

lic, came about. "Roger is an old friend of mine. We've known each other through the film community for many years. And he posted on social media that he was going on tour and was looking for somewhere to stop between Memphis and Norman, Okla. I saw that, and I said, 'Hey Hot Springs is pretty close.' Anderson went on to recount that their friendship started back when, as a youth, Anderson ran an experimental film festival, and Beebe was among the first people to submit a film.

The event was held at the school's Creativity and Innovation Complex. In the middle of the room, I noticed that there were about seven different projectors, at least five of them were for 16 mm film strips. They were large, gray machines with giant looping reels that fed the film through the projectors. There was something archaic about Beebe's setup, but also something refreshing, knowing we weren't just getting a digital file from the cloud. We were being exposed to something tangible, or at least as tangible as images being projected on a screen at 24 frames per second can be.

Beebe is a professor in the Departments of Art, Theater, Film, and Media Arts at Ohio State University in Columbus. He has been making films since the 1990s. And every so often he gathers up his films and goes on tour, traveling across the world, screening at unusual venues, like the ČBS Jumbotron in Times Square and McMurdo Station in Antarctica. His shows are more

performance than screening. He has his five 16 mm projectors running simultaneously. Some of his films have images that overlap, and others have images purposefully bleeding beyond the screen and onto the walls. It is like something I have never seen before. Beyond these intricate cinematic configurations, Beebe runs the projectors himself, constantly switching out reels and adjusting their positions. During the show, he was constantly running back and forth from projector to projector, as if he was playing an instrument. His movements and the way he operated the projectors somehow became part of the performance — a man and his machines. "If I were a better guitarist, I probably wouldn't

be doing this," Beebe joked. The films themselves were essayistic in nature, focusing on found landscapes of late first set of shorts he showed was titled "The Strip Mall Trilogy." These were images of neon signs, abandoned and dilapidated buildings, concrete wastelands and rusty metal. One student in the crowd commented that the shorts made her angry at how ugly and disruptive urban sprawl has made this country. Beebe pointed out that, even though there's truth to that, he's able to see some form of beauty in all the chaos and destruction that people leave The majority of his films

"It's something that stu-

# Spring

 Continued from Page 1E live-action remakes of classic animated films with the tale of a young woman (Rachel Zegler) who is poisoned into a deathlike sleep by a jealous witch (Gal Gadot). Here, Snow White's love interest (Andrew Burnap) has been demoted from prince to a Robin Hood-like bandit named Jonathan, and the seven dwarfs will be rendered not by short actors but CGI. March 21.

'The Alto Knights'

If you're a tad confused by the trailer for this fact-based crime drama about the 1950s rivalry between leaders of the Luciano crime family, it may be because both antagonists — Vito Genovese and Frank Costello — are played by Robert De Niro. Reuniting with director Barry Levinson ("The Wizard of Lies") and writer Nicholas Pileggi ("Goodfellas") for a story

about Genovese's unsuccessful 1957 attempt to put a hit on Costello, the actor can add two more notches to his belt of criminal roles. March 21.

#### 'A Minecraft Movie'

In this part live-action, part CGI fantasy adventure inspired by the popular world-building video game, four outcasts from the real world (Jason Momoa, Danielle Brooks, Emma Myers and Sebastian Eugene Hansen) find themselves transported to the Overworld, a magical place described by Jack Black's guide, Steve, as "a wonderland where anything you can imagine is possible – as long as what you imagine can be built out of blocks." Directed by Jared Hess of 'Napoleon Dynamite," the family-friendly film involves a battle against evil forces. April 4.

'Sinners'

Michael B. Jordan reunites with frequent filmmaking partner Ryan Coogler to play twin brothers, in what the

increasingly turns to alcohol to cope with his challenges, which include ever-increasing medical bills tied to Aus-

tin's myriad bone breaks. With near certainty, Scott's drinking will lead to a reality-shifting moment of ening moments we him drunk and loading his two sons into a vehicle, Teresa nowhere to be seen. The second part of the character's journey, which sees him put in the work to be a better man and father, begins after that.

Narrated almost solely by Austin, "The Unbreakable Boy" is a bit too precious in spots. On the other hand, it hits home several times, illustrating what life with an autistic child can be like for a family doing its best given its various circumstances.

And Gunn — who, before directing "Ordinary Angels," had a hand in scripting Kingdom Story ventures "American Underdog," the 2021 bio-pic about former NFL standout quarterback Kurt Warner starring Levi, and "Jesus Revolution" (2023) - knows how to put forth a faith-based message without

his work becoming preachy. (Peter Facinelli portrays the pastor of the LeRettes' church, who, while becoming a positive influence on Scott, is only a small part of

Penned by Gunn, "The some kind, as in the film's Unbreakable Boy" ultimately is about family, not spiritu ality. That's accentuated by Levi and Fahy ("One Life to Live," "The White Lotus"), who make Scott and Teresa relatable, not perfect, parents and partners. As written, their love for each other is complicated, their life together accelerated by the first pregnancy, a fact the movie doesn't overlook.

Last but not least, there's Laval ("The Plot Against America," "8-Bit Christmas"), who captures his character's lust for life and is a bundle of almost-nonstop energy, which leads you, the viewer, to worry constantly that Austin's next fall and thus the next trip to the hospital — will come at any

moment. His performance is the standout aspect of what can be, despite its strong points, a rather ordinary movie.

director calls a "genre-fluid" supernatural horror thriller about vampires and "more than just that," set in the Jim Crow South. April 18.

'Thunderbolts\*' Scraped together from the detritus of more comic-book movies and TV series than can be enumerated in this space, a ragtag team of Marvel superheroes, antiheroes and reformed supervillains (Sebastian Stan, David Harbour, Wyatt Russell, Hannah John-Kamen, Olga Kurylenko and Florence Pugh) are recruited by an intelligence operative (Julia Louis-Dreyfus) to perform missions deemed too dangerous and/or sensitive for normie heroes. It's the final chapter in Phase 5 of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, if that means anything. May 2.

#### 'Mission: Impossible — The Fi-

nal Reckoning' "The Final Reckoning" picks up where "Dead Reckoning" left off. (Since that film's release, Paramount has

dropped "Part One" from the title, but the 2023 feature ended in a literal cliff-hanger.) Bad guy Gabriel (Esai Morales) has made off with part of the key that unlocks a world-threatening AI device known as the Entity, and Tom Cruise's Ethan Hunt and his team must stop him. What are the stakes? Only the fate of every living soul on Earth, as the trailer tells us — or at least the destiny of those who can't get enough of what Cruise, so far, keeps delivering. May 23.



## **REVIEW/OPINION** 'The Unbreakable Boy'



Gavin Warren (left) as Logan and Jacob Laval as Austin star in "The Unbreakable Boy." (Lionsgate/TNS/Alan Markfield)

Cast: Zachary Levi, Meghann Fahy, Jacob Laval, Drew Powell, Gavin Warren, Patricia Heaton **Director:** Jon Gunn

Rating: PG, for strong thematic material, alcohol abuse, language and some violence Runnina time: 1 hour, 49 minutes In theaters now

from activities such as playing sports. (For reference, OI is the condition endured by Samuel L. Jackson's character in the M. Night Shyamalan films "Unbreakable" and "Glass.") Scott's life is now official-

ly complicated — and made

even more so in the coming

years when it is determined

Austin (played for the ma-

jority of the movie by Jacob Laval) is also autistic. Although Austin typically is wildly enthusiastic about so much life has to offer he talks, a lot, about the many things that excite him he has his share of difficult moments, emotionally and

physically. As the years pass and the couple has another son, Logan (Gavin Warren), Scott