

Before Sunrise Director: Richard Linklater

I went to *Before Sunrise* with a cynical heart. A movie with advertising that boasts the catchline: 'Can the greatest romance of your life last only one night?,' didn't really grab me. But this was the latest feature from the same Richard Linklater who had beguiled me with *Slacker* and entertained me with *Dazed and Confused*. My misgivings were unwarranted.

The pointed wit and sure structure of Before Sunrise made me realise why I had become so disillusioned with the cinema of Eric Rohmer over the last few years. Rohmer's little contes moraux of the 70s and early 80s (films like My Night with Maude and Claire's Knee) offered me diversion at the time, with their acute and one minded pursuing of one tiny moral point. Before Sunrise has the same concentration of purpose, when Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy meet on a Vienna-bound train, and spend the next 24 hours discovering the city and themselves along the way.

Rohmer was quick to defend and justify the very literary nature of his films, and at the base of *Before Sunrise* is a superb script (co-written with Kim Krizan). A friendship is cemented through quite lengthy stories and recountings, frequently shot in generous takes. With Rohmer, many of us were dependent on subtitles. With Linklater, the subtleties of the dialogue, with all its inflections and ironies, don't remain an arthouse secret.

But dialogue is not always essential. There is a gem of an encounter in the listening booth of a record shop, when Hawke and Delpy listen to an American folk singer and inwardly writhe with a record shop, when Hawke and Delpy listen to an American folk singer and inwardly writhe with

gangling awkwardness. And the few interruptions from other characters (two actors canvassing for their play, a vagrant poet, a fortuneteller) linger in the memory more than one might have suspected.

Before Sunrise proves, yet again, that you can't judge a film by its poster.

WILLIAM DART

A Bronx Tale Director: Robert De Niro

It's 1960, and every street corner in the Bronx is echoing to the sound of doo-wop. Nine year old Calogero Anello has a hero fixation on local hood Sonny (Chazz Palminteri), much against the wishes of the boy's bus-driver father Lorenzo (played by Robert De Niro). It's a struggle of loyalties that pursues Calogero into his teenage years (when he's played by Lillo Brancato).

A Bronx Tale is, first and foremost, a bracing study in values, balancing the scales of love and fear, as Chazz Palminteri's script would have it. Taken from the actor's one man show which was, in turn, based on memories of his own childhood years, it's a neat piece of writing. And as an actor, Palminteri gives flesh, blood and charm to the often unscrupulous Sonny, a man who has fashioned a life survival kit out of the writings of Machiavelli.

De Niro allows himself a few directorial flourishes, most stunningly in a basement crap game, in which you can almost smell the sweat and garlic, and later, when a gang of bikers are 'evicted' from the neighbourhood bar while the Moonglows croon 'The Ten Commandments of Love' on the soundtrack — nice touch this one. On the whole, though, it's a rather under-played affair, carried by the direct and honest performances of the cast, Brancato is especially effective.

Some Issues are left unresolved. Despite Taral Hicks' utter naturalness as Rosina, a fraught inter-racial affair between her and Calogero doesn't really gel, although it is connected with the final winding up of the plot. In the last count, even though Frank Sinatra has been superseded by Marvin Gaye, we're still firmly in the Italian neighbourhood, right through to some extraordinary melodramatic farewells in the funeral parlour. That this extraordinary scene comes off is the ultimate testament to the sincerity of all involved with this film.

WILLIAM DART

Ed Wood Director: Tim Burton

Ten years ago, Ed Wood was a cult figure, known to a few transvestites who revered *Glen or Glenda* and to those stalwart souls who would sit through all night schlock fests in seedy cinemas in Soho and Santa Monica to see Wood's *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. Now the worst director in the history of the cinema receives his dues from none other than Tim Burton, a man with a marked penchant for the dark and the quirky—what else could you say about a career which runs from *PeeWee's Great Adventure* to *Nightmare before Christmas*, with a couple of *Batmans* along the way?

The connection between Wood and Burton, then, might seem tenuous. But there is a real admiration there: Burton finds 'something beautiful about somebody who does what they love to do, no matter how misguided, and remains optimistic and up beat against all odds.' This is certainly the Ed Wood that he chooses to present (the film spares us Wood's sad decline in the 60s and 70s). Shot in cool black and white, the dark side of Hollywood has never looked tackier. Everything is makeshift and make do, from the grotty motel room office of Wood's first producer to the rambling warehouse where the masterworks are spawned.

The script is breathless ("Why spend your life making someone else's dream?," is one of the many pieces of Wood's deathless philosophy that we're treated to), and the cast respond brilliantly, especially Bill Murray, scrumptiously effete as Bunny Breckenridge, just back from a failed sex change operation across the border, with a Mariachi band in harness.

Whether Johnny Depp is believable as the rather frumpy Wood is a moot point. This is Ed Wood as dapper film buff, which he simply wasn't. Depp is just impossibly glamorous whether he's in trousers and sports coat or angora sweater and pumps.

The kingpin of the film is Martin Landau's wonderful take on Bela Lugosi. Landau catches that moment in Norma Desmond-land where reality and Hollywood become terminally confused. "Home, I have no home," he roars, outside his suburban home, the lines per courtesy of Ed's *Bride of the Monster*. This Oscar winning performance ranges from knockabout farce (Bela writhing with a decidedly limp octopus in some backwater pond while Ed's camera rolls) to the Immensely moving (the hospital scenes are harrowing).

The central irony of Ed Wood is that one of today's most immaculate film craftsmen should pay tribute to one of the cinema's loosest nontalents. And, perhaps not unexpectedly, the result, with more than a few nods to Burton's own work, is delightfully equivocal, riding that edge when trash becomes culture, and culture becomes trash — an aesthetic close to our 90s hearts.

WILLIAM DART

Priest Director: Antonia Bird

Antonia Bird is mightily ambitious in the targets that she sets up — no surprise, perhaps, when one sees her script comes from Jimmy McGovern of *Cracker* fame. Sexual repression, the hypocrisy of the Roman Catholic church, the ugliness of child abuse, and the all encompassing working class gloom and oppression — *Priest* has it all.

Linus Roache is Greg, a youngish gay priest who finds himself posted in one of the tougher districts of Liverpool. His sidekick is the older Matthew, a hearty chap who karaokes 'The Green Grass of Home' at the local, bonks his housekeeper (Cathy Tyson from *Mona Lisa*) and — worst of all — reads *The Guardian*.

Greg's problems come to a head when he forms a relationship of sorts with a gay man he picks up at the local gay bar (a marvellously twitchy Robert Carlyle), and gets knotted up as to whether or not he should inform the authorities about a bit of incest he's heard about in the confession box (a dilemma of classic Hollywood dimensions, this one).

It all sounds like a grinding journey to Mike Leigh country, although Priest is a bit short on Leigh's humour (a quip about Tammy Wynette and John the twenty-third excepted). Bird sets up some effective scenes and some silly ones (the daftest is when the camera zooms round and round the embracing lovers at one point). A heavy directorial hand, coupled with an agit-propscript, does take its toll eventually. This reaches a peak in a scene where Greg rants at Jesus, immobile on the crucifix: "Do something - don't just hang there, you smug, idle bastard." Not content with this, Bird throws in flashbacks, and Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'You'll Never Walk Alone' gets called into service not once, but twice, to underline the message.

WILLIAM DART

Oliver Stone's stoking the fires for more con-

troversy with his new film based on the life of Richard Nixon. Anthony Hopkins plays the late Tricky Dicky in the film entitled simply Nixon ... after yet another cameo, in the recently completed Destiny Turns on the Radio, Quentln Tarantino has finally landed a starring role in the low budget film noir Hands Up. He will play a low-life bootlegger who becomes entangled in the S&M underworld when he falls for a mysterious French woman ... Brlan De Palma's big screen adaptation of Mission Impossible stars Tom Cruise, Emilio Estevez, Emmanuelle Beart, Ving Rhames and Jon Volght ... rock 'n' roll rouser Courtney Love is to star with Keanu Reeves in Feeling Minnesota ... Ed Wood's Oscar winner Martin Landau plays Gepetto in a new Hollywood version of the fairytale Pinocchio ... Francis Ford Coppola recently ran an open-call audition for his film adaptation of the Jack Kerouac beat classic On the Road, The chance of a lifetime attracted 4,700 wannabes, who were granted a seven second audience with the director Drew Barrymore's follow-up to Boys on the Side is Mad Love. Chris O'Donnell co-stars as the boyfriend who kidnaps her from her downer parents. Ma and Pa don't threaten the lovers' bliss, but the fact Drew lives on an emotional rollercoaster does ... Akira Kurosawa, Pedro Almodovar and Robert Altman have designed watches for Swatch ... Woody Harrelson and Wesley Snipes team up again in Money Train. The pair play two New York transit cops who plan to rob a train which collects millions in subway earnings ... Antonio Banderas stars with Melanie Griffith, Daryl Hannah and Joan Cusack in Two Much. Fernando Trueba, who won an Oscar for Belle Epoque, will direct ... Anna Paquin has been name-dropped in connection with the screen adaptation of the Jane Austen novel Sense and Sensibility. Emma Thompson makes her screenwriting debut on the project, which will star Hugh Grant and Heavenly Creatures' Kate Winslet ... music video wunderkind Spike Jonze is slated to direct a \$25 million film adaptation of the Crockett Johnson children's book Harold and the Purple Crayon.

