



7/5 2 BY THE SEA DRAMA
\$2 MILL BO 873 SCREENS R 122 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Brad Pitt (THELMA AND LOUISE, THE BIG SHORT, FURY, INGLORIOUS BASTERDS, MONEY BALL, 12 YEARS A SLAVE)
Angelina Jolie (MALIFICENT, SALT, THE TOURIST, THE BONE COLLECTOR, MR. & MRS. SMITH)

Angelina Jolie's *By the Sea* begins with an unhappy couple driving along rocky cliffs, bound for an ocean-side hotel in Malta. Trouble brims on every surface in their new, impermanent home. Vanessa (Jolie), veiled by heavy eye makeup and floppy hats, places her sunglasses on tables, their lenses facing down. Time and again, Roland (Brad Pitt) flips them over, onto their temples, but clutters his own desk with ashtrays and glasses of hard liquor. They sit next to a bright red Valentine typewriter, which goes mostly unused. Roland, a once-promising and now failing writer, leaves home early and drinks his days away at the local café. Vanessa, a former dancer, lies in a pill-induced repose, napping and reading magazines. These stars have seen better days, but they can afford to decay in an opulent setting. They arrive with lots of baggage.

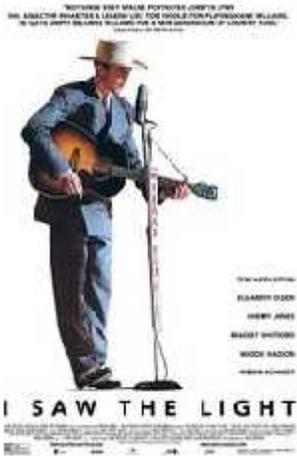
The surface of *By the Sea*, rich with symbolism and dense with 1970s glamour, is at times more interesting than its action. Props and costumes do a lot of the heavy lifting as the film observes Vanessa and Roland, barely engaged by one another, in a series of uneventful days. Vanessa walks to a local grocer, her gait so uncertain the ground seems to be trembling beneath her. Roland, shirt unbuttoned to just below the chest, roves the seaside, soliciting strangers (including a local barkeep, played by Niels Arestrup) about their own marriages, searching for a solution to his. Vanessa, meanwhile, seems content to wilt. Like an Antonioni muse, she drapes herself dramatically over a chair, as if rehearsing the poses she might die in. The question lingering over the film's first act is whether this marriage has suffered an irreparable rift, or whether it's deteriorated into a sort of mutually assured devastation.



But Jolie proves to have more on her mind than a mere homage to the boredom and anomie of European modernist masterworks. When a young couple, Lea (Mélanie Laurent) and Francois (Melvil Poupaud), arrive at the hotel, Vanessa is uninterested in socializing with them, but she thrills to the view of their newlywed fuckfests through a peephole in her bedroom. Eventually, in some of the film's most amusing and indelible images (caught in natural lighting by cinematographer Christian Berger), she invites Roland to watch with her. They see who they were, and who they no longer are. If it stumbles when it seeks our sympathy, it thrives when it's exploiting our fascination with the surface of things, and all that's unknowable underneath.

While broadly afraid of intimacy, Vanessa is particularly terrified of showing her breasts to her husband. Roland is sensitive and empathetic, but mourns the loss of love in their marriage. At one point, he drunkenly paws at Vanessa like a bear. (Pitt, always a dynamically physical actor, gets a lot of mileage out of how often his charisma is flustered, and Jolie sparingly but shrewdly frames him as a potential threat.) Later, attempting to smooth the waters, he takes her out to a fancy dinner. Entering a large, packed restaurant, she quietly protests, "I don't want to be here."

This should do as well as **LADY IN THE VAN, BROOKLYN, LEARNING TO DRIVE, and TIME OUT OF MIND.**



7/5 3 I SAW THE LIGHT DRAMA/MUSICAL
\$3 MILL BO 741 SCREENS **R** 123 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Tom Hiddleston (CRIMSON PEAK, HIGH RISE, THOR 2, THE AVENGERS, WAR HORSE, MIDNIGHT IN PARIS)

Hank Williams logged chart-topping hits titled “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry,” “I’m So Tired of It All,” and “I Don’t Care (If Tomorrow Never Comes),” but it would take only the most literal-minded thinker, or the least empathetic storyteller, to assume that the country singer never derived any joy from life.

Writer-director Marc Abraham’s *I Saw the Light*, a dull dirge with scant interest in Williams beyond his reputation as a tormented artist, does just that.

The film opens with Williams (Tom Hiddleston) and his fiancé, Audrey (Elizabeth Olsen), exchanging marital vows inside an Alabama gas station as a rainstorm rages portentously outside, and concludes shortly after the beleaguered singer is escorted to a show in a hearse-like Oldsmobile, his death coming in the ellipsis generated before the next shot. In between, there are glimpses at Williams’s botched personal relationships, drug and alcohol use, and the kind of artfully timed coughing that still manages to sneak into screenplays as a leaden sign of someone’s imminent demise.

Rarely, however, does the film evince the pleasure Williams took in performing music. Whether he’s scanning the auditorium for his next one-night stand, visibly fuming over a sarcastic remark delivered by a bandmate prior to the count off, or wading into cryptic pre-song banter while drifting off in a morphine-induced high, the performances scan as perfunctory stop gaps between the contrived depictions of a troubled man’s descent into oblivion.



Moreover, Abraham takes Williams at his word that songwriting’s “just what I do,” capturing his labor with a utilitarian blandness that turns even an ostensibly career-changing debut concert at Nashville’s Grand Ole Opry into a monotonous montage of medium shots and gliding full-band views—the resulting look something like that of an archival episode of *MTV Unplugged*. To Abraham’s credit, his unflashy style of coverage, which downplays the crowd and tends toward leisurely cutting rhythms, is based in a respect for Hiddleston’s physicality, for his spot-on approximation of Williams’s hunky-dory hip bounce and machine-like strumming arm. Even if his croon is a bit too polished to pass for Williams’s nasally wail, the actor gets most of the details right, from the country singer’s bashful smile and Southern drawl to the revealing ways in which he’d tip and lower the brim of his cowboy hat.

Those who rented **TUMBLEDOWN, RAY, LOVE AND MERCY, LADY IN THE VAN, YOUTH** and **TRUMBO** will rent this too.



7/12 1 THE DIVERGENT SERIES: ALLEGIAN'T
SCI FI/ACTION \$67 MILL BO 4123 SCREENS PG-13
120 MINUTES DVD/ BLU RAY

Shailene Woodley (INSURGENT, DIVERGENT, THE DESCENDANTS, THE SPECTACULAR NOW)
Jeff Daniels (DUMB AND DUMBER, THE MARTIAN, GOOD NIGHT AND GOOD LUCK, THE LOOKOUT, SOMETHING WILD, RADIO DAYS)

First, the good news: after *Insurgent* – aka *Divergent 2* – tapped out that grey, sim-city-fighting mood, this shiny threequel abseils over the giant wall surrounding dystopian Chicago and smartly drops us into a vibrantly scarlet, Martian-looking landscape, where even the toxic rain is red. Director Robert Schwentke even kicks the enjoyably sub-*Mad Max* extreme-sport action sequences into a higher gear than previous instalments.

But he's banjaxed when the plot dictates that Tris (Shailene Woodley) and her fellow rebels are whisked to CGI-laden genetic-engineering biodome The Bureau. Here, the high-school hokum of the *Divergent* 'factions' becomes high-tech eugenics, as kindly director David (a twinkling Jeff Daniels) determines that only Tris' 'pure' genes can save blighted mankind.

Always fond of pseudo-science and ethical quandaries, the *Divergent* series reaches a new, mildly pretentious peak here. There's even a double-helix Bureau staircase, to underline the science-y symbolism.

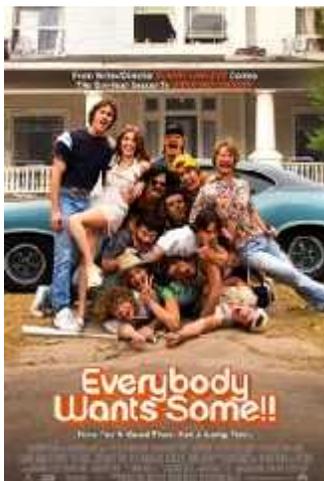
Instead the film favours wide-eyed wrangling between Tris and boyfriend Tobias (Theo James, positively square-jawed with righteousness). The chief joy of the series, Shailene Woodley's tenacious but vulnerable Tris, seems to be unusually Redundant, sidelined into 'pure' passivity while Tobias is Resurgent, muscling through mysteriously violent Marine-style Bureau raids like an action hero. Still, his racing around stops the film flopping too frequently into the repetitive rows that replace heated clinches this time out.



Splitting the final book into two movies (*Ascendant* is due next summer) should have given *Allegiant* endless plot possibilities to play with. Instead it drags out the Bureau business, with only the eye-candy compensations of cool space-age kit (drone-led gun battles, spaceship crashes, VR surveillance pods).

And though we're asked to invest in the fate of the Chicago inhabitants as well as Team Tris, we see only slivers of the *Allegiant* vs *Factionless* war. Nowhere near enough action, then – but at least the ending is an absolute gas...

OH yeah, this will rent as big as **STAR WARS VII, THE REVENANT, THE BIG SHORT, SPOTLIGHT, MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: ROGUE NATION** and **THE MARTIAN**.



7/12 3 EVERYBODY WANTS SOME!!!

COMEDY

\$4 MILL BO 545 SCREENS R 127 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Blake Jenner (TV—SUPERGIRL, GLEE)
Ryan Guzman (JEM AND THE HOLOGRAMS, BOY NEXT DOOR, APRIL RAIN, ALWAYS WOODSTOCK)

Though billed as a baseball comedy, writer-director Richard Linklater's *Everybody Wants Some!!* owes its heftiest structural and thematic debt to pinball—which shouldn't exactly come as a surprise given the director's longstanding quirk of dropping the vintage arcade machines into his characters' vicinities whenever given an ambient justification for doing so. But more than ever, the actual mechanics of pinball—the multi-directional movement, the cacophony of competing stimuli, the serendipity at play in winning or losing—function as Linklater's guiding principles. The scene-building tactic that the film keeps returning to entails the camera hunkering down in a defined space (a frat-house common room, a bar, a dugout) to observe a large group of characters tripping over each other with rapid-fire quips, cutting between them like a little steel ball careening wildly off ramps and spring-loaded slingshots. It's a strategy that keeps the film at a swift clip, even as it's paradoxically not in a hurry to get anywhere particular.

The same kind of bumper-bounce pandemonium occurs at a plot level. Southeast Texas State University's 1980 baseball squad is the film's dramatic focus, but they're less the assertive agents of the narrative than a malleable entity to be jostled around on a map by the forces of fortuity. Over the course of a boozy week leading up to the start of the semester, the guys find themselves dipping in and out of various regional subcultures: the cocksure jock fraternity to which they belong, of course, but also a denim-and-leather underground punk scene that feels like it's drifted in from *Slacker*, a flamboyant performing arts crowd, and a local Texan cowboy culture always lurking on the fringes of the collegiate debauchery. A rabid appetite for the next Schlitz-swilling shindig is what propels the athletes toward these disparate gatherings, but the film's clear implication is that everyone's on the same game board, enjoying the same party; in a telling touch, Linklater caps off each respective revelry with its own bird's-eye-view shot of musical camaraderie, be it through moshing, two-stepping, or disco-dancing.

One of these reference points becomes the subject of *Everybody Wants Some!!*'s lynchpin scene, yet another that finds Linklater smuggling his artistic and philosophical M.O. into casual banter. A few of the guys are ripping a bong to Pink Floyd's "Fearless" when Willoughby, high as a kite, starts musing on the song's ascending instrumental refrain. It's all about "finding tangents within the framework," he argues, before concluding with a variation on an old chestnut of Linklater wisdom: "Don't be afraid to let the experience find you." The sentiment's getting a bit old on paper, but it's still hard to think of a better encapsulation for the experience of watching Linklater's work, and especially this film, his airiest hangout riff since *School of Rock*. It's one endorphin rush after another, and whenever wistfulness seeps in around the edges, it's not long before another pick-me-up rolls around.

Funny movie will rent as well as **HOW TO BE SINGLE, SISTERS, DIRTY GRANDPA, RIDE ALONG 2** and **DADDY'S HOME**.





7/12 1 MIRACLES FROM HEAVEN DRAMA
PG \$63 MILL BO 3155 SCREENS 109 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Jennifer Garner (TV—ALIAS—FILM—DRAFT DAY, DANNY COLLINS, JUNO, 13 GOING ON 30, CATCH ME IF YOU CAN) Queen Latifa (JOYFUL NOISE, THE DILEMMA, VALENTINE’S DAY, HAIRSPRAY, BEAUTY SHOP, BRINGING DOWN THE HOUSE)

As she did in *The 33*, director Patricia Riggen introduces *Miracles from Heaven’s* characters by establishing one dominant trait that will define them throughout. Also as in that film, she shoots those characters early on at a beatific backyard barbecue, pushing in for idyllic close-ups of wholesome sights like ribs being basted and kids on rope swings to establish a family in the context of its community—a lively congregation led by the friendly, funny, and wise Pastor Scott (John Carroll Lynch). In short, the film’s first few minutes are engineered to make clear that, as Kevin Beam (Martin Henderson) tells his wife, Christy (Jennifer Garner), “It’s a good life, Christy Beam!”

Then their daughter, Anna (Kylie Rogers), begins to suffer from intestinal dysfunction that paralyzes part of her colon and Christy kicks into mother-tiger mode, bouncing her daughter from the local hospital in their Texas town to bigger ones in nearby Houston and finally Boston Children’s Hospital, where she puts her under the care of Dr. Nurko (Eugenio Derbez), a warmhearted joker and one of the world’s leading experts on Anna’s condition. The good doctor does what he can, but nothing seems to help until Anna has another medical emergency, which results in what the doctors call spontaneous remission and the Beams call a miracle.



Based on a book by the real Christy Beam, the film observes the compliant Anna from a bit of a distance, focusing mainly on Christy’s reactions to her daughter’s torment. When they struggle to find a pair of pants that will fit over the girl’s grossly swollen stomach, for instance, the camera zeroes in on Anna’s belly and Christy’s face. The intent is to somewhat anesthetize audiences to the child’s pain, and when she does talk about her situation, it’s often in a stoic manner, and with a calmly astute vocabulary, that comes off as oddly clinical, like when she tells her sisters that their mother is upset “because when someone you love gets sick, it causes stress.”

The sheer emotional impact of imagining a child in such peril sometimes overcomes that handicap, flooding scenes with genuine feeling, like the one where Anna drops her usual wide-eyed deadpan and tells her mother she wants to just be done with the pain and die. For the most part, though, situations and people are sketched out too lightly to leave an emotional trace, like the too-deliberately named Angela (Queen Latifah, grossly underutilized), a kindly waitress who befriends Anna and Christy in a Boston diner and then takes the next day off to show them around the city.

That scene is played mostly for laughs at the dilapidated state of Angela’s tin can of a car, and we get only the briefest of glimpses of her after that, making her loving farewell to mother and daughter when they leave Boston for the last time feel unearned. Equally inauthentic is a widely repeated quote, misattributed to Albert Einstein, that Christy solemnly parrots, about how there are two ways to go through life, as if nothing were a miracle or as if everything was.

This will do as well as **MAX, PITCH PERFECT 2, MISS YOU ALREADY, THE LONGEST RIDE, PROJECT ALMANAC, and THE DUFF.**



7/19 3 MILES AHEAD MUSICAL DRAMA
\$3 MILL BO 527 SCREENS R 100 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

**Don Cheadle (TV---HOUSE OF LIES---FILM—AVENGERS:
AGE OF ULTRON, FLIGHT, IRON MAN 3, BROOKLYN’S
FINEST)**

Like the unruly spawn of *The End of the Tour* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Miles Ahead* is a fictionalized biography of a real artist that pairs its subject with a journalist turned sidekick of sorts. Unlike *The End of the Tour*'s logorrheic David Foster Wallace, *Miles Ahead*'s Miles Davis (Don Cheadle) is tight-lipped and enigmatic, too cool to ever spill his guts—except maybe literally, in one of the comically inept gunfights he keeps getting into. Instead of talking to *Rolling Stone* freelancer Dave Brill (Ewan McGregor), he makes him his wingman on a series of quixotic quests, pursuing a tape of the only music he's recorded during a long fallow period; the \$20,000 he says his thuggish producer, Harper (Michael Stuhlbarg), owes him; and the mounds of cocaine that fuel his erratic, often violent, possibly paranoid behavior.

Cheadle, who directed and co-wrote the film, says he didn't want to make a standard biopic, and he succeeds in sidestepping the facile pop psychologizing and lachrymose sentimentality of films like *Ray* and *Walk the Line*, not to mention their compulsion for locating the source of an artist's unhappiness and talent in some childhood trauma. But he fails to provide any real insight into Davis's thoughts or feelings.

It's never clear whether Harper really owes Davis money, since the musician is shown to have had periods of paranoia in *Miles Ahead*'s frequent flashbacks to a happier time, when his musical career and his romance with his first wife, Frances Taylor (Emayatzy Corinealdi), were both in bloom. The question Brill raises at the start, which is echoed by nearly everyone else Davis encounters—why has he been silent for the past five years?—is never answered, and no clue is offered as to why someone who was surrounded by people in his prime has become such a recluse, apparently satisfied to pad about his cluttered apartment alone until Brill shows up.



But *Miles Ahead* happily revels in Davis's music, as in a lovely final sequence in which the actual members of his second great quartet recreate a song they played together in concert. The songs the film samples cover a wide range of Davis's constantly evolving styles, and a scene in which he works with other musicians and a conductor in his basement studio on one of the songs from his 1960 album *Sketches of Spain* conveys the precision and assurance with which Davis mapped out his complex compositions.

Cheadle, whose compact, wiry frame is a good match for Davis's, gives a brilliant physical performance, nailing the musician's raspy whisper of a voice, his imperious stare, and the rocking walk he adopted to favor an injured hip. But in the end, looking the part isn't enough. Less a character study than an impressionistic portrait of a troubled artist's internal chaos, *Miles Ahead* supplies just enough Davis to leave us jonesing for more.

This will rent as well as **WALK THE LINE, RAY, I SAW THE LIGHT, and SELMA.**



7/19 2 THE PERFECT MATCH COMEDY
\$10 MILL BO 925 SCREENS R 96 MINUTES
DVD/ BLU RAY

Terrence Jenkins (SPARKLE, BURLESQUE, STOMP THE YARD 2, BAGGAGE CLAIM)

Pleasant enough, if not paper-thin and featherweight, *The Perfect Match* is a bland picture tarring attractive people that never quite seems to connect the dots. The romance at the core of the story is between Charlie (**Terrence Jenkins**), an agent with an incredible home, and Eva (**Cassie Ventura**, perhaps best known as R&B singer Cassie who had a hit single *Me & U* a few years ago), a gorgeous women of little substance — although we learn she does like *House of Cards*. At one point in their friends with benefits arrangement, director **Billie Woodruff** (*Honey, Addicted*) makes his point with a montage scored to current radio hit *Player* by Tinashe, in one of the many moments that feel a little too on the nose. With an uneven ensemble, *The Perfect Match* attempts to add context to Charlie's life: his sister Sherry (**Paula Patton**) is conveniently a therapist who offers insight into their childhood (tying Charlie's fear of intimacy to the death of their parents). She allows Charlie to land a client of her's (rapper **French Montana**, playing himself), yet the artist never quite has the comic payoff we hope for, even if provides a Jerry Maguire moment for Charlie and his crew at work.

Charlie instead takes up photography, finding a reemergence of his adolescence in his relationship with Eva, all while his friends are in seriously committed relationships. They provide some comic relief, including Victor (**Robert Christopher Riley**) planning his wedding to Ginger (**Lauren London**). Meanwhile, his pal Rick (**Donald Faison**) is forced into a fertility clinic after his wife Pressie (**Dascha Polanco**) hasn't had any luck conceiving.

The Perfect Match offers us the kind of cheesy hot and steamy "romance" montages that seemed to pass into parody once Tommy Wiseau ruined them for all of mankind in *The Room*. On one hand, the picture is somewhat of a throwback to the kind of African-American-centric romantic comedies that launched the careers of Morris Chestnut, Gabrielle Union, and **Gary Hardwick** (a co-writer here), focusing on often Los Angeles- or Atlanta-centered professional, educated African-Americans navigating love while managing a work/life balance. *The Perfect Match*, unlike Hardwick's *The Brothers* and *Deliver Us From Eva*, seems to lack the joy, insight and big laughs of those two pictures. Neatly wrapping it all up in a bow, right down to big reveals and reconciliations, *The Perfect Match* offers not nearly enough twists on a tired formula. While the sexy production and costume design evokes an aspirational lifestyle, the thin character development keep the film from taking off. *The Perfect Match* won't exactly insult your intelligence, but it did make me wish that Hardwick would revisit *The Brothers* in the form of a sequel like *The Best Man* enjoyed a few years ago.

This will rent as well as **BAGGAGE CLAIM, BARBERSHOP 2, RIDE ALONG 2, DADDY'S HOME** and **PERFECT MAN**.



7/21 1 BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE ACTION

\$326 MILL BO 4032 SCREENS **PG-13** 1512 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO/3 D 3 DISC COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Ben Affleck (ARGO, SWINGERS, THE TOWN, GONE GIRL, THE SUM OF ALL FEARS)

Henry Cavill (MAN OF STEEL, THE COLD LIGHT OF DAY, RED RIDING HOOD, STARDUST, WHATEVER WORKS)

In this sequel-cum-gliadatorial duel, Bruce Wayne (Ben Affleck) is having none of that. *Dawn of Justice* begins in his image, crosscutting yet another iteration of Wayne's emotional death (the brutal sidewalk murder of his parents) with his rebirth as the Dark Knight, depicted as a levitation out of a cage propelled by a swirling vortex of bats. Moments later, a grown Wayne, graying at the temples, is at the site of *Man of Steel's* calamitous finale, wandering into a cloud of smoke bluntly evocative of 9/11. The billionaire heir of Wayne Enterprises saves what lives he can as he catches a glimpse of Superman, crashing through buildings full of needlessly endangered Americans. The Caped Crusader is again reborn, this time as a weary, nativist warrior heedlessly determined to take down a false prophet.

Clark Kent and his alter ego, meanwhile, are busy embodying fraught American idealism while setting the film's thicket of plot points in motion. The Man of Steel causes an international incident when he rescues Lois Lane (Amy Adams) from the clutches of an African terrorist. Kent, now the cub reporter at the *Daily Planet*, ignores the assignments and dictatorial hot takes of his editor, Perry White (Laurence Fishburne), in order to pursue failures of social justice. Along the way, Kent and Lane tie the terrorists' unique armaments to the laboratory of Lex Luthor (Jesse Eisenberg), here portrayed as a Mark Zuckerberg gone rogue: a venture capitalist with a lust for a secret deposit of Kryptonite, and characterized with an unsettling blend of millennial entitlement and Freudian pathology, unleavened by social graces. (Eisenberg's strange, committed performance is helplessly at odds with the film's self-referential moves to place him in the lineage of Heath Ledger's Joker.) Luthor's attempts to negotiate an import treaty for the foreign Kryptonite draw the attention of a vengeful Batman and a mysterious woman that informed fans will immediately recognize as Diana Prince, a.k.a. Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot).



For about an hour, *Dawn of Justice* moves with irresistible confidence through its byzantine and ultimately pointless narrative, painting a detailed portrait of a world where indistinct strains of liberal-humanist optimism and nativistic cynicism gird for battle. These opposing viewpoints, seen through the film's blurry politics, both inhabit a declinist vision of America: a Maya Lin-inspired memorial to Superman's heroics is vandalized by a double amputee, Wallace Keefe (Scoot McNairy), who's later goaded into an act of homegrown terrorism; the exploits of our dueling heroes are debated into a familiar breed of soul-deadening numbness thanks to a parade of cameos by prominent media personalities. Though the film's machinations force Batman and Superman to devolve into ideological incoherence, both Cavill and Affleck anchor their characters in finely calibrated emotional turmoil. (Cavill, in particular, is unexpectedly tender and charismatic as Clark, and by extension Superman, grapples with incompatible notions of moral good.)

The film relentlessly hypes the duel between Batman and Superman, but it's obliged to prevent their conflict from cohering into a genuine debate over moral values or identity politics, because the two must reconcile for future products where other combatants will be introduced. The gears of production move at warp speed through the string of final showdowns and false finales.

This will be as huge as **THE AVENGERS, FANTASTIC FOUR, THE REVENANT, DADDY'S HOME, SPECTRE, THE MARTIAN** and **STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON**.



7/26 1 BARBERSHOP THE NEXT CUT COMEDY
\$55 MILL BO 2676 SCREENS PG-13 116 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Ice Cube (DIRTY GRANDPA, STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON, THE NIGHT BEFORE, HORRIBLE BOSSES 2)
Regina Hall (BARBERSHOP THE NEXT CUT, VACATION, THINK LIKE A MAN TOO, ABOUT LAST NIGHT)
Cedric The Entertainer (BARBERSHOP, HAUNTED HOUSE 2, CAUGHT ON TAPE, LARRY CROWNE)

Though the recent collapse of civic peace in the Windy City would seem to signal a darker, more somber installment of the *Barbershop* series, the film's collection of caricatures shall not be moved. If *Chi-raq* processed the mounting bloodshed as a wild, annotation-filled dissertation, *The Next Cut*, directed by Spike Lee's cousin, Malcolm D. Lee, is a pop sonata of stand-up comedy routines layered with, if not vitality, then at least honest energy.

As Calvin explains very early on in the film, he's Chicago's biggest cheerleader (which is more than one can say of the production itself, which filmed in Atlanta). But the rise of the teenage revolt at his doorstep hits too close to home with his only son, Jalen (Michael Rainey Jr.), now old enough to be in danger of recruitment. Calvin and his merry band of stylists—well, not *that* merry—spend their work days on constant guard, clipping away and squaring off at the line separating the men's and women's halves of the shop, in a neat visual representation of social bifurcation.

The film is a pop sonata of stand-up comedy routines layered with, if not vitality, then at least honest energy.

And in contrast to *Barbershop* and *Back in Business*, where the shop's banter felt like a spontaneous reflection of camaraderie, in *The Next Cut* the overlapping zingers and shade ring with the unmistakable metallic flavor of gallows humor. At one point, Eddie is tasked by an angry mother to give a preteen boy a George Jefferson cut as punishment. It's a moment that in any other context would've been a quick visual throwaway, but here carries the added symbolic baggage of an adult community struggling to figure out just how to deal with an out-of-control youth population.



Malcolm D. Lee has proven a remarkably sturdy master of unabashedly populist ensemble comedies. If nothing he's done since *Undercover Brother* has quite matched that film's level of satiric ambition (he's at the perpetual mercy of his scripts), there's no small value to what he's managed to accomplish in the warm, nostalgic glow of *Roll Bounce* or the reasonably un-clumsy emotional gear shifts in *The Best Man Holiday*.

While he never goes so far as to resist or subvert the crassly commercial scripts he's given or choose to work with, Lee's good enough with his performers to flip stereotypes on the page to familiar archetypes on the screen. *The Next Cut* certainly doesn't have all the answers, or any of them; a 48-hour cease fire brokered between two rival gang heads, so that the shop can try to go viral with a hashtag that's damn near longer than Twitter's character limit, tests all credibility. But the filmmaker's skill with large casts clues viewers into the conversation. And in the bargain we now have a long-needed addendum to the Chekhov's gun trope: If a gun or a Nicki Minaj is introduced in the first act, they must go off by act three.

This one will rent as well as **NEIGHBORS, BEST MAN HOLIDAY, THE PERFECT MAN, THINK LIKE A MAN TOO, BARBERSHOP** and **UNDERCOVER BROTHER**.



7/26 1 **THE BOSS** COMEDY

\$64 MILL BO 3495 SCREENS R 96 MINUTES
DVD/ COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Melissa McCarthy (TV---MIKE AND MOLLY---FILM—
TAMMY, ST. VINCENT, THE HEAT, HANGOVER III,
IDENTITY THIEF, BRIDESMAIDS)
Kristen bell (TV—HOUSE OF LIES, ZOMBIE, THE
SIMPSONS, ---FILM---ZOOTOPIA)**

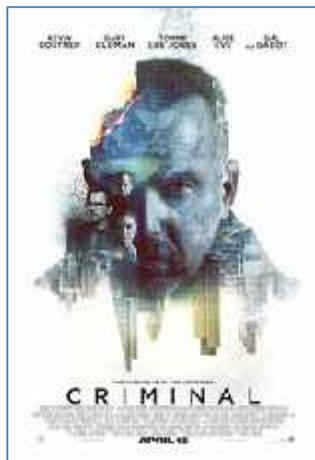
From the moment the words pass Michelle's lips and she's served a wrist-slap sentence for insider trading, it's pretty clear that the script, by McCarthy and her director husband, Ben Falcone, is setting her up to start feeling some type of way, but *The Boss* spends its sweet, shapeless time getting there. And, for a while at least, the lack of narrative strategy ironically works for the film, giving McCarthy carte blanche to gleefully get ugly in the name of comedy.

Upon Michelle's release, she finds all her assets have been seized, and she's forced to crash on her former executive assistant Claire's (Kristen Bell) couch while she tries to piece together her shattered empire. Her efforts begin with shouting down a table of investors about what assholes they all are, homing in most viciously at the one whose wife just died. From there, she takes Claire's daughter, Rachel (Ella Anderson), to her Scout troop meeting, squares off against another mother with a litany of whispered four-letter words, and hatches a plan to pinch girls to sell brownies instead of cookies, the recipe for which she more or less steals from Claire. (Oh, and while babysitting, she also introduces Rachel to the joys of [The Texas Chainsaw Massacre](#).)



So long as the film remains committed to the amorality of McCarthy's character, who's indeed a vision in her tight Suze Orman pixie cut and turtleneck blouses yanked up to meet the jawline, it's at least funny without being particularly entertaining. The incongruity between McCarthy's eagerness as a performer and her character's total lack of compassion makes the film somehow both restless and tedious, no more so than when the two competing mother-daughter groups square off against one another in an extended, vicious turf war.

This will be loved by those who rented **HOW TO BE SINGLE, NEIGHBORS, TAMMY, GET HARD, UNFINISHED BUSINESS, ZOOLANDER 2, DIRTY GRANDPA, THE INTERN.**



7/26 2 CRIMINAL ACTION

\$16 MILL BO 1856 SCREENS R 113 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Kevin Costner (DANCES WITH WOLVES, 3 DAYS TO KILL, FIELD OF DREAMS, THE BODY GUARD, FOR LOVE OF THE GAME, 3000 MILES TO GRACELAND)

Ryan Reynolds (DEADPOOL, SELF/LESS, WOMAN IN GOLD, SAFE HOUSE, THE CHANGE-UP, SMOKIN ACES)

Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman might have goofed philosophically about the weird science that successfully implants the memories and secrets of Reynolds's dead CIA operative, Bill Pope, straight into the frontal lobe of a death-row inmate, Jericho Stewart (Kevin Costner), maybe even seen it as an allegory for the ownership of the self and celebrity. Luc Besson might have pop-operatically raised it to a mythic grandeur. And Steven Soderbergh would have certainly taken pleasure, as he did when he pulled back Gwyneth Paltrow's scalp flap in Contagion, at the sight of Reynolds's Bill twitching in rigor mortis on a hospital gurney as his valuable brain matter is injected into the star of Field of Dreams. Vroman, though, inertly observes the procedure, treating it as the first of many robotic gesticulations toward the preordained climax between a bunch of CIA operatives and a Spanish super terrorist.

Throughout, a game Costner and Gal Gadot fight a losing battle to wring pathos from the perpetually sidelined conceit of Jericho potentially finding his emotional side because of his forced surgery. For the filmmakers, Jericho's realization that he holds the key—in his mind!—to the location of a bagful of cash and a hacker known as The Dutchman (played by Michael Pitt as a collision of multiple international accents) is just a jumping-off point for a treasure hunt throughout London that's brutalizing for its foregrounding of inconsequential incident. Long before one of the worst CGI missiles in movie history course-corrects itself to trigger Criminal's resolution, one may have already prayed a dozen times to be transplanted into some kind of safe space where Jericho's off-repeated threats to his enemies, "You hurt me...I hurt you worse," felt as if they weren't actually being directed at the audience itself. And you



know, it doesn't matter, it's just a movie and fairly entertaining with Costner playing a nasty.

Action always rents well. Check how you did with **CREED, RUN ALL NIGHT, IN THE HEART OF THE SEA, THE FINEST HOURS, 13 HOURS, TRIPLE 9, BLACK MASS** and **THE TRANSPORTER REFUELED.**



7/26 2 **HARDCORE HENRY** ACTION

\$10 MILL BO 3015 SCREENS **R** 96 MINUTES DVD/ BLU RAY 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Sharlto Copley (CHAPPIE, MALIFICENT, OLDBOY, OPEN GRAVE, DISTRICT 9)

Tim Roth (THE HATEFUL 8, MR. RIGHT, SELMA, EVEN MONEY, PLANET OF THE APES)

In the first-person action film *Hardcore Henry*, injury and violence, even insult, are the means to an uncertain end. Throughout, the titular Henry is called a “pussy” several times, usually in the midst of situations that range from the deceptively mild to the ostentatiously wild, from a bus ride down a Moscow street to a conversation with a coke-snorting playboy inside a bordello, where he’s uncertain if the persons to every side of him are friends or foes. His only hope to find the wife, Estelle (Haley Bennett), whose face he doesn’t even remember is a man named Jimmy (Sharlto Copley), but given that this wily stranger was shot dead by police only minutes before, how to explain the moment when Jimmy shows up across from Henry dressed as a hobo and rambling about how Mother Russia is “too goddamned hot”?

The film’s first-person perspective is so ingeniously sustained throughout that you’re liable to swat at your face when a man covered in steel and wielding a flamethrower sets Henry on fire, or hold on to the edge of your seat when he battles the telekinetic warlord Akan (Danila Kozlovsky) atop a skyscraper from which a free fall seems inevitable. The film’s singular ambition is to immerse the viewer in the thick of a frenzied drive toward the promise of a lover’s touch and a few more minutes of life. Our aesthetic perception is linked to our perception of Henry himself, so that the film becomes a study of empathy through aesthetics. It’s not for nothing that Henry is made to have no voice, as *Hardcore Henry’s* unbelievably precise choreography of action seeks to tap into a universal feeling of powerlessness.



Throughout Henry’s rampage, Moscow’s citizens are mostly seen as bystanders, though sometimes our hero will pummel his way through a situation where masculine aggression reigns and demands to be checked. He may not remember himself too well, but Henry intuits the difference between right and wrong, crushing a police officer’s balls in the midst of an attempted rape. In another scene, after dousing the fire that takes over his body with a young man’s water bottle, Henry pilfers a bunch of clothes from a park bench, subsequently triggering a run-in with a group of roughs that quickly turns into a pissing contest. Henry might have apologized to them if he had a voice, but his mission is urgent, so he must content himself by clocking one of the men in the face for so arrogantly parading his sense of his own physical might.

This will rent as well as **THE FINEST HOURS, THE 5TH WAVE, TRUE STORY, STAND OFF, LEGEND, BLACK MASS** and **CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES**.



7/26 3 SING STREET MUSICAL DRAMA
\$3 MILL BO 525 SCREENS PG-13 104 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Ferdia Walsh-Peelo (HIS DEBUT)

With *Sing Street*, writer-director John Carney's cinematic themes—budding musicians and the music they strive to create and perform, with the possibility of romance always hovering in the air—remain the same, but the melodies keep changing, though not for the better. His 2007 debut, [Once](#), may have been a sentimental fantasy at its core, but by applying a handheld vérité style to the material and encouraging a sense of improvisatory looseness from his actors, the film exuded a feeling of lived-in honesty that refreshed the story's clichés. Some of that attention to realism could still be found in his bigger-budget follow-up, [Begin Again](#), but the film ultimately felt more sugary, especially in its simplistic take on the eternal conflict between maintaining artistic integrity and selling out for the sake of a wider audience—and it's no surprise that Carney was for the former.

Now, with *Sing Street*, all traces of grit have been scrubbed away in favor of relentlessly crowd-pleasing slickness. It hardly matters that Carney's latest is a period piece, set in Dublin in 1985 during a period of economic turmoil that saw many Irish leave the country for better opportunities in London—or that Conor (Ferdia Walsh-Peelo) and the rest of his teenage band deal more in Second British Invasion-style synth-pop and new wave than the acoustic balladry at the center of Carney's previous films. There's barely anything new here that Carney didn't dramatize more incisively before.

In *Sing Street*, all traces of grit from writer-director John Carney's earlier films have been scrubbed away in favor of relentlessly crowd-pleasing slickness.

Conor's own personal circumstances aren't even terribly original. As a result of his ever-bickering parents (Aidan Gillen and Maria Doyle Kennedy) not having enough money to keep him in a Jesuit school, he's forced to attend Synge Street, a lesser Christian Brothers school where he endures the usual indignities, especially from the bullying Barry (Ian Kenny) and a headmaster, Baxter (Don Wycherley), so bent on uniformity that he punishes Conor for not wearing black shoes like the rest of the students. Naturally, music becomes his outlet for letting off steam—but only when he blurts out to Raphina (Lucy Boynton), a strikingly dressed and styled young woman he notices across the street from school one day, that he's in a band about to shoot a music video that he begins to seriously entertain the notion of becoming a musician. Conor subsequently, and with the help of a wannabe business entrepreneur, Darren (Ben Carolan), recruits fellow school peers like multi-talented instrumentalist Eamon (Mark McKenna) to try to turn that fib into reality.

Raphina, who lives in an all-girls home and says she's planning to go to London to kickstart a modeling career, seems to act entirely in relation to the dictates of patriarchal ideology, but it isn't as if any of the other characters are less stereotypically drawn—most egregiously the one black band member, Ngig (Percy Chamburuka), who, after an introduction in which he punctures Conor, Darren, and Eamon's racist assumptions about him, fades into the background, framed only in the context of Conor's coming of age and given less of a personality than Raphina, Eamon, and much of the rest of the cast.

