



LEFT PHOTO: JOSH NAULT

## The Gateway's best and worst of

# summer 2006



### GROUP COMMENTARY

So, that's it, folks; the summer of 2006 has come and gone, leaving us to reminisce about days passed under old oak trees and nights spent in someone else's bed. But before you start kicking yourself, wishing you had taken a picture of your friend's face stuffed with three bags of mini donuts, or that you had recorded your uncle having a drunken conversation with a newspaper box, read on: the Gateway's illustrious A&E writers have documented the best and worst moments in summer entertainment, just for you to look back on when you're senile. Think of it as our version of "Summer of '69."

### MATTHEW BARRETT

#### Best: Street Performers Festival

The Street Performers Festival is one of the few opportunities outside a Social 30 class to bust out the term "cultural mosaic." The acts at the festival were as diverse as the performers themselves, and the cultural influences each brought to their craft only amplified the creativity of their shtick. From outlandish dances to acrobatics, puppetry and illusion, the Street Performers festival was a panacea against boredom. The only real downside to the Festival was certain performers' callous haranguing of the audience for ridiculous amounts of money. Even still, the festival managed to remain one of the highlights of the summer.

#### Worst: Miami Vice

*Miami Vice* doesn't come close to Michael Mann's other work. It doesn't have the anxieties and tensions of *Collateral*, nor does it have the fleshed-out characters of *Heat*. And even though it's a movie that was marketed as dealing with identity, the most the audience gets in

way of depth is stunted conversations between Foxx and Farrell that are usually resolved with monosyllabic affirmatives, the occasional grunt or an overly protracted silence. The character relationships are about as flat as the plot developments, both of which only start going somewhere during the last leg of the film. Before that, though, you're pretty much watching Colin Farrell pout for two hours.

### JOHN KMECH

#### Best: The Road to Guantanamo

In the four long months of summer, I was witness to several good concerts and movies. Since I am forced to choose one as the best, I will go with the one that was the hardest hitting, emotionally speaking: the docudrama *The Road to Guantanamo*. Telling the story of three British Muslim brothers imprisoned and interrogated at Guantanamo Bay for two years, then released without charges, the film delivers a powerful and sobering message about the state of human rights in the world during the war on terror, forcing you to think about where exactly the line should be drawn. If you're anything like me, you will likely leave the movie educated, which is how political documentaries should affect us all.

#### Worst: Little Man

While *Snakes On A Plane* was definitely over-hyped for its sheer badness, the worst entertainment award has to go to *Little Man*. The Wayans Brothers—who, it must be reminded, used to be funny—have truly hit rock bottom, taking the lowest common denominator to levels below those achieved even by *White Chicks*. What resulted was a movie so mind-bogglingly stupid that it makes me wonder how anyone could enjoy it without having a complete frontal lobotomy. How do scripts like this get green-lighted? Oh, right, they pull in a healthy box office receipt, in this case almost \$60 million. It's the same way Rob Schneider pays the bills. Not to mention that the whole script was plagiarized from a

far-superior Warner Brothers cartoon. The Wayans can next be seen elevating the comedic bar in witty and completely unpredictable ways in *Pretty Ugly*, a film where a fashionable socialite wakes up one day to find herself ugly. No doubt, it will likely be up for nomination for the worst of summer 2007.

### ELIZABETH VAIL

#### Best: Little Miss Sunshine

No one saw him wailing the names of *American Idol* winners while horrifying amounts of hair were waxed from his body, or expressing his disappointment about how the lava lamp he drank didn't contain any lava, but many of us did witness Steve Carell prancing his way onto what is the highlight of the summer movie season. Propelled by a wisp of a road-trip plot, *Little Miss Sunshine* chugs forward on the marvellous comedic talents of suicidal, gay Proust scholar Carell, harried mother Toni Collette, motivational speaker/dad Greg Kinnear and heroin-snorting granddad Alan Arkan. With a family on the skids forced to endure long drives, bad rest stops and endless spats to register the daughter Olive (an appealing Abigail Breslin) in the titular beauty pageant, first-time feature directors Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris demonstrate that the family that steals-cadavers-and-gets-their-freak-on-to-Rick-James together, stays together.

#### Worst: The Devil Wears Prada

This was the summer of the bad book adaptation. Based on Lauren Weisberger's spiteful roman à clef, *The Devil Wears Prada* had all of its deliciously catty claws worn off by its tumble through the Hollywood machine, emerging as a fluffy marshmallow girl-power version, as cloying as its plot was hypocritical. The result of trying to please everybody is that nobody ends up satisfied. Even Meryl Streep's turn as editrix Miranda Priestly is given a saccharine explanation for her divine bitch-goddess behaviour (awww, another divorce? How sad). It's hard to take themes

of uniqueness over conformity seriously when they're packaged in a film as obviously test-screened and commercial as this one.

### EDMON ROTEA

#### Best: Little Miss Sunshine

The story about a dysfunctional family coming together in order to get their young daughter into the finals of a beauty pageant is easily the funniest and most heartwarming family movie to be released in years. With an ensemble of characters consisting of a drug-using grandfather, his motivational-speaker son and his estranged overstressed wife, as well as a suicidal, gay brother (Steve Carell) who has trouble communicating with his Nietzsche-fanatical nephew, the only happiness in the life of seven-year-old Olive (Abigail Breslin) is becoming a finalist in the Little Miss Sunshine beauty pageant. Breslin is a scene-stealer with her cuteness, innocence and genuine down-to-earth personality—traits that help her character reveal the artificialness and absurdity of children's beauty pageants. *Little Miss Sunshine* is a film with a lot of heart and soul. It's the classic story of a family uniting together to overcome adversity—and triumphantly succeeding in the end.

#### Worst: Miami Vice

Fans of the '80s television series and those expecting a fun action flick will be bitterly disappointed. The film's dark and gritty look, gruesome shoot-out scenes and violence that oozed from the trailer make *Miami Vice* look like a winner. However, trailers can be misleading. What's most disappointing, though, is watching the movie begin in the middle of the story itself, leaving audiences to partake in too much mental work, trying to figure out the plot, the characters' relationships with each other, and what's happening during each scene. Even worse is the fact that Detective Ricardo Tubbs (Jamie Foxx) is more of a minor character in comparison to the villain, Collin Farrell's on-screen love interest, Isabella (Gong Li). With the film's slick-looking cars, fast

planes, speedboats and cool clothes, *Miami Vice* is a film that's nice on the eyes, but in terms of narrative, it's not fun to watch.

### TYSON DURST

#### Best: Fringe Festival

The award for the best piece of entertainment that I witnessed this past summer in our fair city goes to the Fringe Festival, which marked its 25-year anniversary. From the moment I entered the Fringe grounds on a perfect Friday afternoon full of sunshine and deep-fried lollipops, I was mesmerized by belly dancers, intrigued by magicians, and dazzled by the creativity and talent of various buskers—while in awe at the colossal amount of food available in deep-fried format. Add to this the main attraction of live theatre appealing to a wide range of tastes and interests, and you've got a festival loaded with more fun than a helium-filled balloon wrapped in cotton candy. And, eBay aside, where else can I buy a customized Bruce Lee light-switch cover as a souvenir of my Fringe fun?

#### Worst: Superman Returns

Sadly, *Superman Returns* turned out to be a rehashed, weaker version of *Superman: The Movie* that simply wastes the villainous potential of Lex Luthor and the talents of Kevin Spacey. I was hoping that Bryan Singer, who jumped the *X-Men* money train, would put his own stamp on the iconic character in the same way that Christopher Nolan reinvigorated the Bat franchise with last year's *Batman Begins*. But, instead, much of the script was pretty much recycled from the original film. However, Singer did give us a pile of over-the-top religious imagery and subtext that points to Superman really being Jesus in a cape. I suppose that might be more palatable to some audiences than the idea of a super-powered illegal immigrant from another planet, co-created by a Jewish Canadian, walking among the American public under a secret identity and disguise. Just put on a pair of glasses and—whammo! Invisible! Take that FBI!