

Number ten on my list is *Truth or Dare*, a supremely entertaining behind-the-scenes look at Madonna during her "Blond Ambition" concert tour. Director Alek Keshishian followed the singer virtually everywhere with hand-held 16 millimeter cameras, and the result was fascinating documentary footage of the singer interacting with her band, her family and her then-boyfriend Warren Beatty. Shooting in 35 millimeter color, Keshishian also successfully captured the energy and spirit of Madonna's highly theatrical concerts. Some critics dismissed the rockumentary as choreographed hype, but if you approached the film with an open mind, it provided a revealing glimpse into the mind of one of America's biggest superstars.

Next on my list was the year's most appealing comedy, *City Slickers*, an affectionate ode to male bonding. The talented cast, which featured Billy Crystal, Bruno Kirby and Daniel Stern (in his most impressive performance yet), served up surprisingly rich characters, instilling in the film a poignant undercurrent of human drama. Jack Palance stole the movie during his few scenes as a seasoned cowboy, while Crystal proved that his wonderful comic performance in *When Harry Met Sally...* was no fluke.

Director Alan Parker brought an atypically light touch to *The Commitments*, his delightfully charming tale of an aspiring soul band in Ireland. The amateur cast of real life musicians performed their parts with irresistible flair, especially during the smoldering concert scenes, which were filmed live. I didn't have more fun in a movie theater this year than during the two hours I spent watching *The Commitments*. Big laughs, good music, charismatic actors, and a compelling story. Who could ask for anything more?

1991 saw the release of more than 19 movies directed by minority filmmakers. Unfortunately, the cream of the crop, *Hangin' with the Homeboys*, was lost in the shuffle. This gem was superior to both *Boyz n the Hood* and *Straight Out of Brooklyn* in every respect, except for its marketing campaign. Writer-director Joseph Vasquez told a powerful yet simple tale of four friends—two black, two Puerto Rican—out for a night on the town. The characters and their misadventures were refreshingly authentic, thanks to heartfelt performances by Doug E. Doug, Mario Joyner, John Leguizamo, and Nestor Serrano.

City of Hope, number six on my list, was an un-

compromising portrait of urban decay in modern day America. Writer-director John Sayles deftly juggled more than 30 characters and half a dozen story lines, creating an intricate collage of class warfare, racism, and political corruption. Vincent Spano and Joe Morton led a uniformly outstanding cast, which included Sayles in a supporting role. Miraculously, the director managed to keep the numerous character and plot strands clearly distinct from one another—thanks to a nifty job in the editing room.

Director James Cameron returned to form with [*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*](#), which was 100 times more creative—and more satisfying—than we had any right to expect from a sequel. The movie had all the ingredients of a classic sci-fi thriller, starting with 215 pounds of prime Schwarzenegger, who turned in a surprisingly rich performance. The amazing state-of-the-art computer animation boggled the mind and dazzled the senses. More than anything, however, it was *T2's* riveting story line and unexpected humanity which made it not only a smashing piece of science fiction, but also one of the year's best films.

The Grifters was technically a 1990 release, but it makes my list this year because the general public didn't get to see it until 1991. You would be hard pressed to find three finer performances in one film than those in *The Grifters*. Angelica Huston, Annette Bening and John Cusack ignited the screen as a trio of con artists tangled in a deadly web of sex, betrayal, greed and Oedipal conflict. The knockout performances, shocking finale and haunting musical score gave the movie startling intensity and devastating impact. Credit director Stephen Frears and writer Donald Westlake for transforming Jim Thompson's 1950s novel into a haunting film noir for the '90s.

At number three is [*The Doors*](#), which was an extraordinary technical and artistic achievement not only for director Oliver Stone, but also for Val Kilmer, who gave a mind blowing performance as Jim Morrison. The movie chronicled the singer's self-destructive descent with a chilling sense of claustrophobia and perfectly captured the essence of the late '60s and early '70s. The concert scenes were electrifying, thanks to sensational cinematography, sets and sound editing. Stone's potent visual style and the Doors' evocative music combined to form a wild ride—for the eyes *and* ears.

1991 Top 10 (Cont.)

Silence of the Lambs, number two on my list, was not just another thriller about a psychopathic serial killer; it was also a nightmarish journey into darkness and depravity—one that made you think while you squirmed in your seat and gasped in horror. Anthony Hopkins dominated the film with a chilling performance as Hannibal “The Cannibal” Lecter, a supremely intelligent psychologist with a penchant for human flesh. It was Jodie Foster, however, who grounded the movie in reality, with her subtle performance as a tough but vulnerable FBI-trainee. Her dynamic interplay with Hopkins crackled with tension. Masterfully directed by Jonathan Demme, *Silence* was 1991’s

most frightening film and one of its most daring and disturbing.

Finally, my choice for the best film of 1991 is [*Barton Fink*](#), the shockingly original vision written and directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. The movie offered genuine suspense by creating a unique universe in which you didn’t have a clue what was going to happen next. The fluid direction, mesmerizing cinematography and surrealistic production design came together to cast a hypnotic spell, transfixing you to the screen. John Turturro and John Goodman turned in riveting performances which—like the film—lingered in memory long after the credits rolled.