

will get her any closer to whatever it is her ultimate acting goal may be, it certainly won't hurt her chances, either. In it, she plays a woman, who, after one too many beatings, hops in her truck and heads due east to Middle of Nowhere, N.M. (It's right around the corner to co-writer/director Rajeev Nirmalakhandan's home town of Las Cruces.) Experiencing car trouble in L.A. can be a real bitch, but having one break down in Middle of Nowhere can spell disaster. Fortunately, she arrives at the home of an elderly woman, who, only minutes earlier, died while watching television. Once bad-ass Maya determines that the woman isn't sleeping, she goes through her purse and medicine cabinet, before stealing the delivery van in the back-40.

What Maya doesn't realize until later is that the van doubles as a bedroom on wheels for a young man, Duncan, who is autistic in the same way as Raymond Babbitt is in "Rain Man." Duncan (Chris Marquette) has a job behind the counter at a local mini-mart, but uses flash cards to read the faces of the patrons. His gift appears to be drawing maps on sections of paper toweling from the rest rooms. He has a couple of other useful talents, but an obsession with time, cleanliness and diet work against him. Even so, Maya reluctantly decides to help him find the father who selfishly gave him up when he became a burden. Along the way, of course, Duncan teaches Maya a few much-needed lessons in tolerance, patience and sobriety. When she left L.A., Maya had a massive chip on shoulder toward everyone, including her own, differently estranged, mother (Veronica Cartwright), who has the personality of a wounded rattlesnake. "The Odd Way Home" benefits mostly from the chemistry between the lead actors and nicely photographed New Mexico locations, which range from the dunes at White Sands, to the state's mountains, forests, gorges and high desert. Nirmalakhandan's directorial ambitions aren't quite ready for prime time, as he tends to rely on clichés and improbable narrative leaps to cover for lapses in the script. The DVD adds a making-of featurette and short film, in which stars Willis and cleverly makes sound points about autism. I'm pretty sure that Willis is performing songs of her own creation in the barroom scenes, and she's not bad. — *Gary Dretzka*

BB King: The Life of Riley: Blu-ray

Too many years ago than I care to count, I attended a BB King concert at the University of Wisconsin. I didn't know it at the time, but, as is recalled in this fine bio-doc, King was only then beginning to play auditoriums and other venues not limited to the so-called Chitlin' Circuit. Playing before predominantly white audiences not only meant wider exposure and greater financial opportunities, but also that King and other top blues musicians were finally being recognized by a broad cross-section of U.S. audiences for their contributions to American culture and rock 'n' roll, itself. Ironically, British bands had been paying homage to the artists in their music for years and it was only through such acts as the Rolling Stones and Yardbirds that white audiences here finally figured out what they were missing. After soaking in our welcoming applause that night, BB struck a single note on Lucille and held it for what seemed like an eternity, before exploding into "Every Day I Have the Blues." A couple of dozen white musicians are interviewed in Jon Brewer's comprehensive "BB King: The Life of Riley" and most of them recall experiencing the very same sensation listening to master for the first time in concert. Besides these musicians, Brewer was able to gather friends, relatives, business associates and fellow bluesmen to add their stories to those told by BB — then 85, now nearly 90 — about how a Mississippi sharecroppers' son became King of the Blues. Unlike so many other Delta blues guitarists, King's migration north ended in Memphis. It was from there that the name Riley B. King was changed to Beale Street Blues Boy, Blues Boy and, finally, BB, and his style solidified into something distinctly different than what was being heard in Chicago, New Orleans, Texas and Detroit. BB's sound was influenced by Blind Lemon Jefferson, T-Bone Walker, Bukka White and Sonny Boy Williamson, from whose West Memphis radio program King's early fame would emerge. He would get a radio show of his own, before hitting the Chitlin' Circuit and playing as many as 350 gigs a year.

His fame would grow as his records began being played in the South, but, as was so often the case in the 1960s for black entertainers, King wouldn't realize anything resembling a sustainable income from music, alone, until it was validated by British invaders John Mayall, Eric Clapton, the Rolling Stones, the first incarnation of Fleetwood Mac and the Beatles, all of whom repay the favor by appearing here in one form or another. King's influence on more contemporary artists is reflected in interviews with Bono, Carlos Santana, Susan Tedeschi, Slash, Dr. John, Bonnie Raitt and several other blues-rockers. Even if the documentary overflows with adoration for King, it's fairly candid about the hazards faced by wives of musicians who thrive on the road and the deal-making that too often ignores the people who helped an artist get to the point where it behooves him to turn to more powerful management. The challenges of trying to make a living — in the cotton fields or in nightclubs — under the dark clouds of segregation also are recounted. If it's about 20 minutes too long, well, BB deserves our indulgence. Otherwise, the portrait painted of King in "Life of Riley," narrated by Morgan Freeman, is that of a genuinely nice guy, who's universally admired by his peers, many of whom have benefited from his generosity and wisdom. Moreover, he can still bring it. The strikingly presented Blu-ray disc adds extended interviews and selections from a command performance at the Royal Albert Hall. — *Gary Dretzka*

Jimmy P.

European filmmakers have always looked at the American West through different eyes than their Hollywood counterparts. As colonialists, themselves, they understood how American writers and directors helped mask what had really happened in the American Indian Wars in the name of Manifest Destiny, corporate imperialism, Jesus Christ and racial segregation. By appropriating the ancestral lands of native tribesmen and profiting from the slave trade in Africa, while also exploiting nature's bounty in countless other countries, Europeans had shown their American offspring how it's done and justify it to their God. After World War II, it was only a matter of time before European leaders would have deal with the chickens that came home to roost in such places as Algeria, the Congo and Vietnam. Perhaps, if they had John Wayne on their side in the wars for liberation, instead of the French Foreign Legion, the colonial powers would have been able to prolong the agony for a couple more years. As much as foreign filmmakers admired the cowboy heroes and such directors as John Ford, Howard Hawks and Raoul Walsh, they deplored the horrifying conditions Native American were required to endure in times of peace. As long as genocide sold tickets, there wasn't a heck of a lot they could do about it, though.

While Arnaud Desplechin's highly compelling drama, "Jimmy P." — released theatrically as "Jimmy P.: Psychotherapy of a Plains Indian" — isn't intended to stand as an indictment of American colonialism, it could easily have been sentimentalized or played as tragedy. After all, Jimmy Picard's story does bear a certain resemblance to that of U.S. Marine Corporal Ira Hayes, the Pima who helped raise the flag over Iwo Jima, only to die drunk and alone outside an abandoned adobe hut in Arizona. Jimmy Picard is a Blackfoot war veteran, who, after suffering severe headaches, hearing loss, dizzy spells and catatonia, is sent to a VA hospital in Kansas that specializes in psychiatric therapy. It wasn't at all clear what caused Picard's problems, but noted clinic director, Dr. Karl Menninger, sensed that they might be related to the patient's cultural background, somehow, and exasperated by what once was called "shell shock." He turns to the man, Georges Devereux, who would author the book on which this movie is based. The therapist is a Hungarian Jewish émigré to France, born Gyorgy Dobo, who converted there to Catholicism and spent two years among the Mojave tribe as ethno-psychiatrist. Combining the work of a therapist with that of an anthropologist wasn't recognized by the analytical establishment, so he was between gigs at the time of the call. While not conversant in the languages of the Plains tribes, Devereux knew enough Mojave to understand the nuances and rhythms of Indian dialects, which, in the past, had sometimes been considered symptoms of mental retardation.

Devereux's first question to Picard — "In your dreams, do you speak English or Blackfoot?" — immediately establishes a rapport between the two very different outsiders. They are played with great empathy by the always wonderful Mathieu Amalric and Benicio del Toro, an actor whose speech patterns have also been misconstrued. Not being the kind of Freudian disciple who requires a couch or one-sided discussions, Devereux encourages an on-going dialogue between them. Eventually, Picard begins to remember things that happen in his dreams and flash back to incidents that shaped him as a youth. Devereux asks him what the imagery might portend in the Native American tradition and how it might relate to the events that play out in the flashbacks. The question then becomes one of determining how much having a foot in two worlds, especially under wartime conditions, may have contributed to his current condition. In Devereux's opinion, Picard isn't suffering from schizophrenia and such treatments as shock therapy and psychotropic drugs would do nothing but exasperate the symptoms. What's wonderful, then, are interchanges between patient and therapist, most of which Desplechin captures in tight focus or two-shots. It's a talky movie, then, but the excitement that comes with watching two first-rate actors working at the top of the game is palpable. Desplechin ("A Christmas Tale") takes us out of the clinic often enough to understand how Picard's roots were split between growing up poor and parentless on the reservation, the natural magnificence of the Montana landscape and perils of life in white