



was: hot-wired, bug-eyed, brusque, and chatty—always smartly chatty—with his films acting as fuzzily blurry and conversationally bleak (yet damned funny, even at their most harrowing) productions where focus and frame was strictly optional.

If Cassavetes' *Five Films* within the new Criterion Collection Blu-ray box were albums, they'd be in-the-red and frazzled to the ear, something akin to Royal Trux or the first album from Sonic Youth: revolutionary in their messiness.

Though it would take nearly a decade for him to truly follow up the jazz improvisational, post-Beat gen flick *Shadows* (1959) with its Charlie Mingus music and its controversial tale of a black woman, a white man and interracial relationships, Cassavetes set his aesthetic in motion there with its trailed-off, unfinished thoughts and scenes that either ended abruptly or continued too long after its climactic moment ended. Like the man himself, Cassavetes' movies drifted until their weirdly open-ended finale.

Unlike him. No one ever seems to really DO anything or get anywhere in these films (though they do talk quite a bit about doing something and getting somewhere); they are the ultimate slice-of-life flicks, perhaps even Cassavetes' life. 1968's *Faces* was shot in his house with Rowlands and John Marley acting as alienated marrieds, talking about sex and disillusionment with brutal honesty and dating younger mates. I don't know if Cassavetes and Rowland had this problem, but damn if you didn't consider such hum-drum heartache between them. Same with *A Woman Under the Influence* from 1974, a breathless drama where the ultimate suburban housewife (a gorgeous Rowlands, pictured above, who never actually looks the part of an everyday hausfrau) struggles with sanity while tending to day-to-day drudgery. Rowlands, like the film itself, is at once extraordinary and ordinary. Though you crave to see restless males comedies such as *Husbands* and the charmingly silly *Minnie and Moskowitz* (the *Next Five Films*, perhaps?), the noir-ish and removed-from-real-life *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976), with the dignified Ben Gazzara as a strip club owner, is a brawny denouement to the box's bravura. Only Rowlands' feline fear and feminine energy as a theater actress stunned into reality after the death of a fan in *Opening Night* (1977) can top Gazzara's graceful machismo.

Be it a male character or a woman, Cassavetes knew to just let the camera run long and the emotions would overflow without sentiment or sap.  
—A.D. AMOROSI



### MY FAVORITE FILM: Dave "Gruber" Allen vs. Fanny and Alexander

TV's most famous high school counselor views Bergman glögg goggles.

"My favorite film is one of three: The one I just saw; the one I'm watching; and the next one I'm going to see," says Dave "Gruber" Allen. "That's kind of how capricious I am in life and often when it comes to 'favorite' stuff. Especially movies. But among my favorite movies is *Fanny and Alexander*. *Gimme Shelter* is a "close second. *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* and *The Producers* both get a lifetime achievement award!"

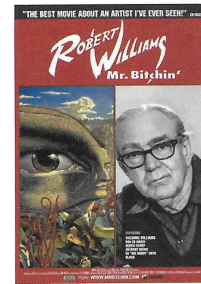
Allen, fiftysomething, played Jeff Rosso, the high school counselor from the brilliant-but-canceled late-nineties series *Freaks & Geeks*. He was also the titular truck driver from 2007 series *The Naked Trucker & T-Bones Show*. Lately, Allen voices the father on the Fox animated series *Axe Cop*.

Ingmar Bergman's 1982 drama *Fanny and Alexander* made its U.S. debut in 1983, and that's when Allen first saw the film. Two years out of college, he'd recently taken "Screenplays of Ingmar Bergman," which he calls "the sort of elective you get at a Swedish-founded liberal arts college."

"It's so fantastical," Allen says. "It's olde-tymey—older tyme, anyway; Swedish-y; huge in scope; and it's heavy, man! And even funny in parts. "If you like birth, death, love, hate, joy, fear, food, theater, music, puppets, ghosts, flared farts, drinking, laughing, uncontrollable sobbing, religion, religion-bashing, costumes, beautiful cinematography, reading English subtitles, existential angst, a loving God, a wrathful God, possibly no God?, olde-tymey stuff, universal truths, universal questions... it's all there." And despite the film's 3+ hours length, Allen says that when it ended, "I kind of just wanted to stay there [in the theater]. Maybe that's the business of a lot of films: They help you escape where you are to where the film takes you, e.g. 1980's Des Moines to Olde Tyme Sweden!"

Since then, Allen has screened *Fanny and Alexander* "maybe [two other times] and only once on the big screen." He doesn't need to watch it often, because the film's emotional denouement really resonates. "Since then I've seen much more of the human experience... births, deaths, and all the stuff of life in between, so I'd be bringing more experiential glögg (Swedish punch!) to the party. And yeah, the mood of a film always changes my perception of the real world. I'm always a lot nicer—a kinder person—when I exit a movie. I should go to more movies."

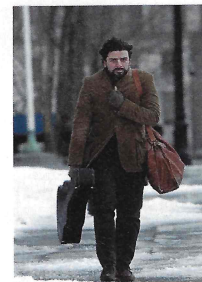
—RANDY HARWARD



### ROBERT WILLIAMS: MR. BITCHIN'

(Cinema Libre Studio, 89 minutes)  
www.cinamalibrestudio.com

Lowbrow art depicts imagery and themes that would hurt your grandmother's feelings. With Robert Williams, the godfather of the genre, we're talking about sex, drugs, gore, hot rods, deposed Middle Eastern monarchs and assorted other creatures/monsters/dictators. For a reference point, open your copy of Guns N' Roses' *Appetite for Destruction*. You know that far-out — *bitchin'* — illustration? The one originally meant for the cover, but was changed because of protests? That's how the album got its name—and Axl Rose and Slash both appear in the film to pay tribute. "It wasn't good enough when we...put it on the inside," Slash says, "You know, that blows." But that's the kind of reaction the mainstream world had to Williams' art: it frightened them. Except it thrilled what Williams terms a "small" following of people. It's actually much larger than that, and includes fellow artists Ed "Big Daddy" Roth and Joe Coleman, jazz luminary Artie Shaw, Blondie's Debbie Harry and a slew of others who saw the vivid, visceral beauty in so-called ugly images. A documentary that preaches to the converted, but will convert anyone who watches. *Mr. Bitchin'* is totally bitchin'. —RANDY HARWARD



### Simple Twist Of Fate

The Coen Brothers take on the Greenwich Village '60s folk scene.

Despite looking back masterfully to the American West of the late 1800s (*True Grit*), the deep South of the 1930s (*O Brother,*

*Where Art Thou?*), the cracking-wise Depression-era '20s (*The Hudsucker Proxy*) and the Prohibition (*Miller's Crossing*) or the literary Hollywood of the '40s (*Barton Fink*), the directing/writing Coen Brothers (otherwise known as Ethan and Joel) could hardly be thought of as period film makers. There's too much monkey business between the auteur brothers; too much of their own dedication to their quick talking, observational language and Coen-ese atmospheres where looking away from the screen occurs at the viewer's peril. These guys aren't genre-specific. They're *Coen-centric*.

*Inside Llewyn Davis*, then, is a rarity amongst the Coens' works. The film is richly dedicated to much of the precise spirit of Greenwich Village's early '60s folk scene and all of its nuances (smoky coffeehouses, earnest emotionalism) at the cusp of a revolution: the entrance of Bob Dylan, and the explosion