



**The Last King Of Scotland**  
Fox

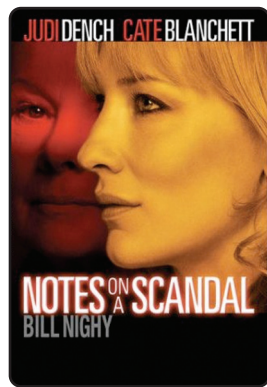
This fairly faithful adaptation of the best selling novel of the same name was directed by Kevin MacDonald who must be credited with coaxing an Oscar-winning performance out of Forest Whitaker, even if in service of a mediocre melodrama. While Whitaker's interpretation of Idi Amin is admittedly mesmerizing, what's nevertheless disappointing is the script's reluctance to humanize its antagonist, settling instead to portray him as that stereotypical mental patient (a la Hannibal Lecter) who alternates unpredictably between the polar opposites of a refined charm and sheer brutality.

The picture co-stars James McAvoy as Dr. Nicholas Garrigan, a recent med school grad who arrives in the country planning to practice among the poor. However, after being recruited as the head-of-state personal physician, he soon finds himself at the beck-and-call of Amin, serving also as a confidante, sidekick and stand-in at the presidential palace.

Enjoying a Mercedes convertible and other considerable perks of his plumb position, Garrigan initially has no problem with his job. But as evidence of the wholesale ethnic cleansing unfolding across the countryside is gradually revealed, he becomes acutely aware of his boss' penchant for cruelty and of his own implied complicity as a medical mercenary. Then, when members of the cabinet start disappearing too, the doctor suddenly has a reason to fear for his own safety, since he's become infatuated with one of Amin's neglected wives (Kerry Washington).

More fiction than fact, *The Last King Of Scotland* is less a historical epic than an unlikely buddy flick about a carefree adventurer completely compromised and corrupted by the embodiment of evil. Recommended for the opportunity to witness Whitaker at his very best, despite the fact the gifted actor was restricted by a screenplay which failed to imbue his character with a complex range of emotions or motivations.

Good.



DVD Extras: Theatrical trailer, international trailer, alternate scenes, deleted scenes, director's commentary, casting session, an Idi Amin documentary, plus a Forest Whitaker featurette.

—by Kam Williams

**Notes On A Scandal/Fox**

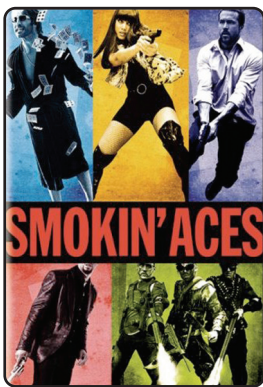
Sheba Hart (Cate Blanchett), the new art teacher at a high school in London, finds herself soon befriended by Barbara Covett (Dame Judi Dench), a lonely colleague who happens to be a very repressed lesbian. Sheba's straight, though mired in a passionless marriage to a much older man (Bill Nighy) and burdened by a bratty daughter (Juno Temple) and a son (Max Lewis) with Down Syndrome.

As a consequence of this middle-age malaise, she embarks on a steamy, sordid affair with Steven Connolly (Andrew Simpson), a 15-year-old student who makes her feel young again. All is fine and dandy till the day Barbara catches the couple in a compromising position.

Curiously, rather than report Sheba, she just lets Sheba know that she's aware of the adulterous affair and orders that it end immediately in return for a promise to keep the indiscretion private. However, like the British version of Mary Kay Letourneau, the shameless hussy just can't get enough of her veritable Vili Fualaa.

Her kinky compulsion plays right into Barbara's hands, for the 60-something spinster has an unrequited crush on Sheba and is not above resorting to a thinly veiled threat of blackmail as leverage for an intimate liaison. So unfolds *Notes On A Scandal*, as adapted from the perhaps more appropriately titled *What Was She Thinking?*, the best-selling novel by Zoe Heller.

Judi Dench enjoys a juicy role here as the naughty narrator who gradually becomes hopelessly obsessed with the object of her affection. Cate Blanchett is almost as intriguing as a woman with needs willing to risk her family reputation for a little something on the side. Too bad Sheba's too blinded by lust to see that her



latent confidante has a selfish Sappho agenda.

Excellent.

DVD Extras: Director's commentary, interviews with Cate Blanchett and Bill Nighy, theatrical trailers, "Behind the Scenes" and several additional featurettes.

—by Kam Williams

**Smokin' Aces/Universal**

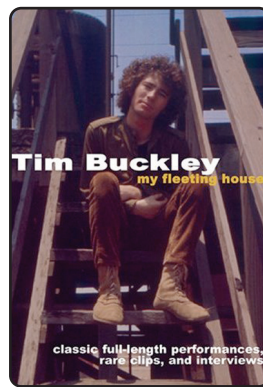
Buddy "Aces" Israel (Jeremy Piven) was a two-bit magician with a mediocre lounge act until the Mafia turned him into a Las Vegas headliner. But instead of feeling indebted to mob boss Primo Sparazza (Joseph Ruskin) for the helping hand, the creep decided to create his own competing crime organization.

Initially, Aces met with a measure of success and celebrated by overindulging in women and wine. Until the Feds got the goods on him. Then, rather than spend the rest of his life in prison, he agreed to turn state's evidence. However, once word reached Sparazza that Aces was about to testify against him, the aging mobster offered a million dollars to the first person to kill the back-stabbing stool pigeon.

So soon, all sorts of depraved degenerates descend on Buddy's hideout in order to be the one to cash in on the big payday. That, in a nutshell, is the point of departure of this unapologetically gruesome revenge flick. Between beaucoup booty calls, bling and bulletry, *Smokin' Aces* is certainly visually captivating from start to finish. Just don't expect its storyline to be any more sophisticated than the typical gangsta rap video, and you won't be disappointed.

Perhaps most noteworthy is the fact that the movie marks the screen acting debuts of a couple of Grammy-winners, pop diva Alicia Keys and hip-hop artist Common, who acquit themselves quite capably in support roles as a pistol-packin' assassin and a beefy bodyguard, respectively.

The film also features a rainbow coalition of scantily clad models seen hanging around the hedonistic Aces like refugees from a Jay-Z video. Towards the end, unfortunately, the plot makes



a bizarre departure likely to disappoint those not satiated by bloodletting alone.

Fair.

DVD Extras: Commentaries by the director, the editor and cast members Common, Christopher Holley and Zach Cumer, deleted scenes, extended scenes, outtakes, alternate ending, plus three featurettes.

—by Kam Williams

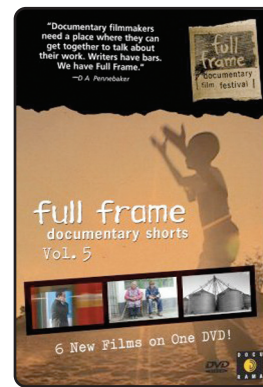
**Tim Buckley**  
*My Fleeting House/MVD*

Tim Buckley was a tragically underappreciated singer-songwriter who died in 1975. Although he is fondly remembered by a core constituency of aficionados, these days he is more often recalled as the late Jeff Buckley's father. This new DVD aims to burnish the older Buckley's reputation while illustrating the lasting impact that he has on today's music.

The filmmakers employ commentary by two key players in the Buckley legacy, co-songwriter Larry Beckett, and longtime Buckley guitarist Lee Underwood, as well as biographer David Browne (*Dream Brothers: The Lives and Music of Jeff and Tim Buckley*). Their comments are interspersed with a series of largely unreleased performance segments that are presented in chronological order. We see Buckley move from folk troubadour, performing on *The Monkees* television show, to jazz innovator, before settling in as a middle-of-the-road folk rocker in the years preceding his death.

Much is made of Buckley's 1970 album *Starsailor*. The album, with its echoes of Miles Davis, was roundly rejected by his audience at the time of its release. But the performances of songs from this era, including "I Woke Up," "Come Here Woman" and the unreleased "Venice Beach (Music Boats By The Bay)," are the most revelatory moments in the film. Although he never really knew his father, it was this music that had the biggest impact on Jeff Buckley.

Tim Buckley was a well-known artist in his time, but his restless nature never allowed him to



become a major star. He never made a lot of money. He just wasn't willing to stand in one place long enough. The drugs that took his life are never mentioned here. These performances make it clear that it is time for a reappraisal of his career.

—by Ken Shane

**Full Frame: Documentary**  
*Shorts Vol. 5/Docurama*

The DVD presentation of the annual short documentary film festival, *Full Frame Vol. 5* contains six shorts with no particular connection besides genre and quality. With styles ranging from eavesdropping on cellphone conversations to meditative portraiture to standard investigative documentary styles, the collection's appeal is for fans of the form, not necessarily a specific cause or idea.

For example, *High Plains Winter* is a set of dialogue-less long takes of the west, before expanding into an onlooker's view of an obscure spot of ski-joring—still without dialogue—before returning to its pastoral aims, sometimes aided by geometry. *Afloat*, on the other hand, is set around a senior citizen swimming pool, reflecting with the pool's denizens above and below the waterline. *The Angelmakers* goes out to a remote Hungarian village that is quickly becoming a ghost town to hear a true story of a group of village women who killed their husbands with arsenic in the late 1920s.

*Stand Like Still Living* follows two people suffering from AIDS in Botswana and films them on death's door. By far the most effective of the films, it borders on invasive, but its message is worth its weight. On the other hand, there's *The Intimacy Of Strangers*, a film that intercuts overheard cellphone conversations together, which is perhaps more invasive than filming the dying.

Special features include biographies on each filmmaker. Recommended.

—by Patrick Slevin

AL FRANKEN: GOD SPOKE  
New Video

CODE NAME: THE CLEANER  
New Line

DÉJÀ VU  
Buena Vista

FLIPPER: THE ORIGINAL  
SERIES SEASON 1  
MGM

THE JOHN CLEESE  
COLLECTION/Kultur

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM  
Fox

THE QUEEN  
Miramax

TSUNAMI: THE AFTERMATH  
HBO

may 1<sup>st</sup>

ALPHA DOG  
Universal

BEVERLY HILLS 90210: THE  
COMPLETE SECOND  
SEASON/Paramount

DREAMGIRLS  
Dreamworks

HAPPILY N'EVER AFTER  
Lionsgate

THE HITCHER  
Rogue

LITTLE CHILDREN  
New Line

MICHAEL PALIN: AROUND  
THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS  
Warner

MELROSE PLACE: SECOND  
SEASON/Paramount

may 8<sup>th</sup>

BECAUSE I SAID SO  
Universal

BREAKING & ENTERING  
Weinstein

CATCH & RELEASE/Sony

LITTLE BRITAIN: LIVE  
Warner

MUSIC & LYRICS  
Warner

THE PAINTED VEIL  
Warner Independent

RAINBOW: UP CLOSE  
& PERSONAL/Koch

THAT '70S SHOW:  
SEASON SIX  
Fox

may 15<sup>th</sup>

AMERICAN DAD:  
VOLUME TWO/Fox

COACH: THE SECOND  
SEASON  
Universal

THE FOUNTAIN  
Warner

GOTHIC VAMPIRES  
FROM HELL  
MVD

PAN'S LABYRINTH  
New Line

SERAPHIM FALLS  
Goldwyn

SPARK  
Warner

STOMP THE YARD  
Sony