

KEANU (2016) ♂♂♂

D: Peter Atencio. Jordan Peele, Keegan-Michael Key, Method Man, Luis Guzman, Nia Long, Will Forte, Tiffany Haddish, Anna Faris. 100 mins. (Warner Home Video) 8/16

Like most sharp TV comedy teams making their debut transition to the big screen, Key and Peele leave much of their more idiosyncratic cerebral magic behind in their home medium. Still, **Keanu** succeeds far better than most of the endless SNL spin-offs and cast showcases (with the probable exception of the enduringly witty **Coneheads**) that continue to pollute 'plexes with alarming regularity. Paring down to their comic essences, Key and Peele play their most basic characters, family man Clarence (Key) and bachelor cousin Rell (Peele), a hip post-modern Abbott and Costello anxiously romping through an unsettled DMZ between white and black cultural identities. **Keanu** also doubles as a more hit-than-miss action comedy spoof, with a depressed Rell's beloved titular kitten supplying the requisite McGuffin to spin the plot in motion. When Keanu's catnapped by thug kingpin Cheddar (Method Man), our protags are forced to pose as hardcore gangstas in order to infiltrate his world. The physical and verbal bits fly faster than the speeding bullets that also punctuate the pic when the pair find themselves in the crossfire between rival gangs, undercover cops, and a pair of doppelganger killers likewise essayed by K&P. Among the celeb cameos, **Scary Movie** regular Faris scores high marks as herself, portrayed here as a giddy Hollywood dope fiend in a scene reminiscent of the violent buy sequence in **True Romance**, while Guzman and Forte furnish similar amusement as a Latino crime lord and Cauç stoner, respectively. In short, **Keanu** supplies a solid fix for K&P fans. Extras include the featurette **Keanu: My First Movie**, deleted scenes and a gag reel.

—*The Phantom*

LISTENING (2014) ♂♂♂1/2

D: Khalil Sullins. Thomas Stroppel, Artie Ahr, Amber Marie Bollinger, Christine Haberberman. 98 mins. (MVD Visual) 7/16

Stumbling through the Cambodian jungle, a young man (Stroppel) arrives at a Buddhist temple, where he seeks the training he needs to correct a terrible mistake. We then flash back to see exactly what that mistake is. While neglecting his wife, child and mounting bills, he and best friend Ahr work in his green-lit garage with equipment "borrowed" from their college, developing a machine that can read thoughts. They are soon joined by Bollinger, whom Ahr pines after, though she has eyes for Stroppel. Over half the film is the story of the creation of the machine and the rising tensions and desperation within the group. Though the idea is interesting, the

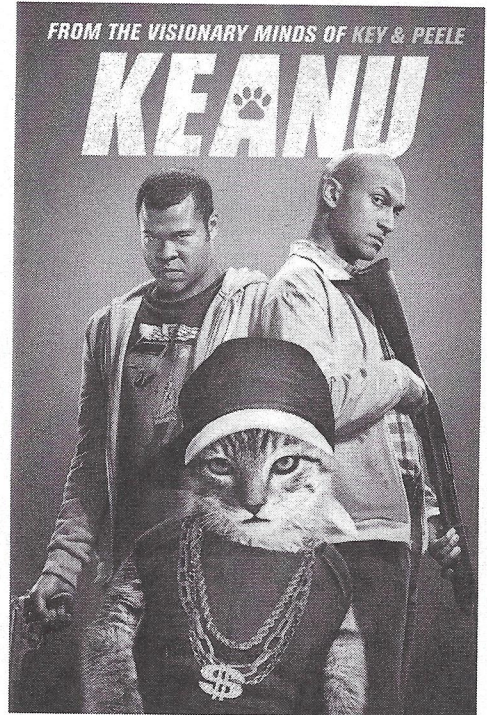
tempo drags here, and after the Cambodian opening, we spend most of our time in the garage, which makes the film's limited budget all the more apparent. Once the thought machine is up and running, things spiral out of control and the pace picks up considerably. In fact, some events and discussions go by a bit too quickly, making suspension of disbelief difficult. Perhaps most frustratingly, though there are some really sharp, fascinating discussions about the consequences of the machine, they occur quite late in the game, are very brief, and aren't fully explored. The performances are solid, though Bollinger is saddled with a role that has the camera ogling her for much of the film. Having said this, the ambition of **Listening**, especially given its budget, is admirable. In the last act, when we move beyond the garage, the film makes the most of its settings, and writer/director Sullins does a good job of creating the impression of major events in play. **Listening** is worth a look, then, but its execution isn't quite up to its conception. Extras include a festival Q&A with Sullins and others.

—David Annandale

THE LOBSTER (2015) ♂♂♂1/2

D: Yorgos Lanthimos. Colin Farrell, Rachel Weisz, John C. Reilly, Lea Seydoux, Angeliki Papouliã, Ben Whishaw. 118 mins. (Lionsgate) 8/16

Cinematic surrealist Lanthimos' English-language debut emerges as an alternately wickedly funny and hauntingly sad satire of discomfiting mating rites and enforced conformity. In an unspecified time and place where being single constitutes a serious crime, unattached offenders are remanded to The Hotel, a combo Club Med and Gitmo, where they're allotted 45 days to secure a partner or be transformed into the animal of their choice. Our protag David (an uncharacteristically passive Farrell, effectively cast against type in a role equally suited to Johnny Depp, and the only character here granted a proper name) opts to become the titular critter if he doesn't make the cut. (His rationale: "Lobsters live to be over 100 years old, have blue blood just like aristocrats, and stay fertile all of their lives.") Accompanied by his brother the dog (who'd flunked an earlier test), David auditions for and is auditioned by disparate and desperate members of the opposite sex. Following a spectacularly failed relationship attempt with the Ilsa-like "Heartless Woman" (Papouliã) that ends in grotesque violence, David and similarly disheartened "Short Sighted Woman" (Weisz) escape into the surrounding woods, where they find dubious shelter among the Loners, a band of fellow fugitives whose arbitrary rules are just as rigid, deranged and Draconian as those of their previous captors. Can the couple find refuge in The City, where TSA types incessantly intimidate and interrogate suspected singles? Auteur Lanthimos takes on large and thorny themes with a fierce and funny urgency and originality, even incorporating a David Lynch-like musical number when creepy resort managers (Gary Moun-



taine, Olivia Colman) perform a scary rendition of "Something's Gotten Hold of My Heart" while their charges dance stiffly before them. In addition to the two leads, Reilly is typically terrific as Lispering Man (who's friends with Whishaw's Limping Man). Withal, this contemporary blend of Kafka, Vonnegut and Lanthimos' own unique vision qualifies as must viewing. Extras include the making-of featurette **The Fabric of Attraction: Concocting The Lobster**.

—*The Phantom*

**GRUMPY OLD CRITICS
(Say the Darnedest Things)**

**DEPT.
NINE LIVES**

Me-ow!

"It's a pet farce so flat it makes you long for the Lubitsch touch of the **Alvin and the Chipmunks** comedies."

Owen Gleiberman, *Variety*

"This witless talking cat movie needs to go out with the kitty litter."

Peter Travers, *Rolling Stone*

"Don't waste the one life you have on **Nine Lives**."

Linda Cook, *Quad City Times*

"The cast member you really feel bad for is the cat."

Neil Genzlinger, *The New York Times*

"Requiescat in puss."

Steve Davis, *The Austin Chronicle*

