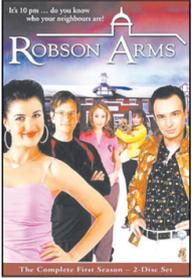


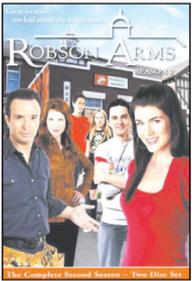
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2008



## 'Robson Arms' a quirky treat from north of the border



**"ROBSON ARMS: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON"** (VSC/MVD Visual) ☆☆☆½ out of five; **"ROBSON ARMS: THE COMPLETE SECOND SEASON"** (VSC/MVD Visual) ☆☆☆ — The ensemble dramedy "Robson Arms" is unlike any show you're likely to come across on American television. This very Canadian production — filmed and set in lovely Vancouver, British Columbia — likely wouldn't fly with mainstream U.S. audiences. (Though Chicago-based cable station WGN airs repeats.)



For those willing to give this under-the-radar gem a chance, the first two seasons (13 half-hour episodes each) are available on DVD, courtesy of VSC and MVD Visual.

The action takes place in a dilapidated apartment building, and each episode takes us behind the door of a different tenant.

This alone sets "Robson Arms" apart from most shows because most characters — save scheming building superintendent Yuri (John Cassini) — appear only sporadically throughout the course of the season. And while this novel approach keeps things fresh, I found myself wishing some of the more interesting Robson residents would get more screen time.

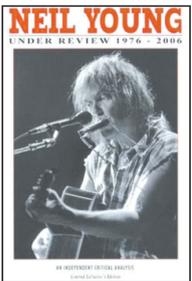
The collection of characters is predictably eclectic. There's a gay couple, a single mom, a widower, a pair of newlyweds, a loner, a pair of stoners, a transplanted Toronto resident, an elderly former hockey player and a mixed-race couple who own and operate the supermarket in the building.

Some, but not all, of the characters interact, but Robson Arms is far from a frat house. Only Yuri knows every tenant (it's his job, of course) and most residents go about their lives in relative solitude.

Among the regulars, stoners Nick (Fred Ewanick) and Hal (Zak Santiago) are a hoot — though not in a Cheech & Chong kind of way — and Alisen Downs' Sault Ste. Marie gets most of the broadly comedic storylines as a Toronto transplant who suffers from alipicia.

The "Robson Arms" format lends itself to frequent guest stars. Season 1 featured Mark McKinney ("Kids in the Hall") and Margot Kidder ("Superman"), while Season 2 lured comedic icons Leslie Nielsen ("The Naked Gun") and Joe Flaherty ("SCTV") into the fold.

While enjoyable, it took me a little while to warm up to Season 1. The unique narrative structure requires a little patience, but once the "Robson Arms" rhythm is established, things unfold nicely. The show hits its stride in Season 2, with an even better mix of comedy and drama, as we grow to care about these quirky Canadians and their quirky lives. (Jeffrey Sisk)



**"NEIL YOUNG: UNDER REVIEW 1976-2006"** (Sexy Intellectual/MVD Visual) ☆☆☆ — By 1976, Neil Young was a bona fide superstar. From his early work with Buffalo Springfield, to Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, to a critically and commercially successful solo career, he had accomplished more by age 31 than many musicians do in an entire lifetime.

After his uninterrupted string of success, the next three decades were hit and miss for the Toronto native. He kept churning out the albums at a clip of better than one per year, but for every stellar effort like "Comes a Time" and "Rust Never Sleeps," there were duds like "Trans" and "Landing On Water."

Those years are chronicled in "Neil Young: Under Review 1976-2006," a good-but-not great installment of this usually first-rate documentary series.

Over the course of 70 minutes, a panel of journalists and music historians analyze Young's work during this period. Their comments are refreshingly candid — Nigel Williamson's dissection of the aforementioned "Trans" is almost painfully funny in its brutal honesty — as they discuss the highs and lows of Young's later career. Most of the panelists agree that the 1980s were a lost decade for the artist until his triumphant 1989 comeback "Freedom," which spawned the hit single "Rockin' in the Free World," and introduced Young to a new generation of music fans.

Despite the solid analysis, however, "Neil Young: Under Review 1976-2006" fails to match the lofty standards established by the series in recent years. Heck, it's not even as good as the installment that focused on Young from 1966-1975. Maybe 30 years is too much to cover in 70 minutes. (JS)



Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe star in "American Gangster," directed by Ridley Scott.

## 'Gangster,' 'Clayton' top DVD releases

By DAVID GERMAIN  
AP Movie Writer

### "American Gangster"

Ridley Scott teams up for a third time with his "Gladiator" star Russell Crowe, but it's Denzel Washington who dominates this crime saga. Washington stars as Harlem drug lord Frank Lucas, who commands New York's heroin trade with a supply smuggled directly from Southeast Asia, with Crowe playing a rogue cop who brings him down. Ruby Dee earned a supporting-actress Academy Award nomination as Lucas' mother. A two-disc DVD set and HD DVD release each contain the theatrical version and an extended cut with an extra 18 minutes. Extras include deleted scenes, commentary with director Scott and screenwriter Steven Zallian and featurettes on the film's music, the drug trade and the real-life men behind the characters. A three-disc DVD set has more documentary segments, including conversations with rappers Common and Tip "T.I." Harris, who co-star in the film. Two-disc DVD set, \$29.98; three-disc DVD set, \$34.98, HD DVD, \$39.98. (Universal)



Tom Wilkinson and George Clooney both earned Academy Award nominations for their work in "Michael Clayton."

### "Michael Clayton"

George Clooney stars in the title role of this legal thriller about a law firm "fixer," an attorney who cleans up sordid messes for top clients but finds his conscience tested amid the corruption he discovers in a corporate class-action case. The film earned seven Oscar nominations, including best picture and acting honors for Clooney, Tilda Swinton and Tom Wilkinson.

The DVD and Blu-ray releases, along with an HD DVD edition that follows on March 11, have deleted scenes with commentary from director Tony Gilroy, who provides commentary for the full film, as well. DVD, \$28.98; Blu-ray and HD DVD, \$35.99 each. (Warner Bros.)

### "In the Valley of Elah"; "Rendition"; "Redacted"

Three Iraq and war-on-terror dramas come to home video. "In the Valley of Elah," from "Crash" director Paul Haggis, stars Tommy Lee Jones, who earned an Oscar nomination for the role, and Charlize Theron in a murder mystery set among U.S. troops newly returned from Iraq.

Reese Witherspoon and Jake Gyllenhaal star in "Rendition," the story of an innocent Egyptian-American man abducted by U.S. intelligence agents and imprisoned overseas, where he is subjected to interrogation and torture under suspicion of terrorism. Brian De Palma directs "Redacted," a harsh tale of rape and murder carried out by U.S. soldiers stationed in Iraq. "In the Valley of Elah" DVD, \$27.95; Blu-ray and HD DVD, \$35.99 each. (Warner Bros.); "Rendition" DVD, \$28.98. (New Line); "Redacted" DVD, \$26.98. (Magnolia)

### "Margot at the Wedding"

Nicole Kidman, Jennifer Jason Leigh and Jack Black star in this dour drama of a judgmental woman who comes to visit for her sister's wedding to an unemployed musician and artist. The DVD has a conversation with Leigh and husband Noah Baumbach, who wrote and directed the movie. DVD, \$29.99. (Paramount)

### "Lust, Caution"

Director Ang Lee returns to Asia for his follow-up to "Brokeback Mountain," spinning a twisting World War II-era tale of a young

Chinese woman (Tang Wei) drawn into a seductive plot to kill a man (Tony Leung) collaborating with the Japanese. The movie is available in the steamy NC-17 theatrical release or a toned-down R-rated version. DVD, \$29.98. (Universal)

### "Run Lola Run"

Tom Tykwer's madly paced 1998 tale debuts on Blu-ray disc. Franka Potente ("The Bourne Identity") plays the title role, a woman racing against time to find a small fortune in cash to save her boyfriend from a mobster's wrath. Tykwer and Potente provide commentary. Blu-Ray, \$28.95. (Sony)

### TV on DVD

#### "Helen Mirren at the BBC"

The Oscar-winning star of "The Queen" is featured in nine TV productions shot from 1974 to 1982: "The Changeling," "The Apple Cart," "Caesar and Claretta," "The Philanthropist," "The Little Minister," "The Country Wife," "Blue Remembered Hills," "Mrs. Reinhardt" and "Soft Targets." The five-disc set also has a new interview with Mirren. DVD set, \$79.98. (BBC)

#### "Walker, Texas Ranger: The Fourth Season"

Chuck Norris is back as a modern lawman with an Old West code of honor. The seven-disc set packs year four's 27 episodes. DVD set, \$54.99. (Paramount)

#### "Coach: The Third Season"

Craig T. Nelson heads on to the field again as a college football coach with an odd assortment of associates. The third year's 22 episodes come in a three-disc set. DVD set, \$26.98. (Universal)

#### "Cops: 20th Anniversary Edition"

The series that pioneered modern reality TV marks its birthday with a two-disc set containing the original pilot, a 20th anniversary special and a collection of highlights from over the years. DVD set, \$29.98. (20th Century Fox)

#### "Father Ted: The Definitive Collection"

The 1990s British comedy follows the zany adventures of three priests running a parish on a remote island. All 25 episodes are included in the five-disc set, which also has commentary and interviews. DVD set, \$79.98. (BBC)