

AMERICAN GANGSTER

AVAILABLE NOW

DIRECTOR: Ridley Scott
WRITER: Steven Zaillian
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Harris Savides
STARRING: Denzel Washington, Russell Crowe, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Josh Brolin, RZA, Ruby Dee
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Universal, 157 mins. (176 mins. unrated)

Biopic succeeds by prioritizing fiction over fact

Ridley Scott's latest—slower and moodier than his recent films—is Stephen Colbert's type of biography. Steven Zaillian's script distills a complex and outrageous historical timeline into a tense and gripping drama. That doesn't mean it's even close to

accurate, but meticulous period detail and compelling turns by all members of the cast lend it a terribly persuasive energy. It *feels* right, truth be damned. The focus is Frank Lucas, a Harlem gangster who famously imported heroin directly from Asia during the Vietnam War, branded it "Blue Magic" and outsold the mob. Denzel Washington channels his authoritative charm into Lucas; Russell Crowe is the downtrodden cop given license to shatter his operation. Washington and Crowe light up this actor's piece, and when they collide in the last act, the film sparks into overdrive despite the fact that the encounter isn't physically energetic. *American Gangster* crackles with such artful performances. **RUSS FISCHER**

VAN MORRISON

Under Review 1964-1974
 RELEASE DATE: APRIL 15

Morrison hidden under review

Van Morrison's initial 10-year run—from the inception of his groundbreaking R&B group Them through his ninth solo album *Veedon Fleece*—was one of the most breathtaking in rock music. *Under Review* celebrates those years,

offering snippets from the albums, plus some radio interviews and concert footage, which collectively make a convincing case for Morrison as the greatest singer of the rock 'n' roll era. It also offers six music critics talking, ad nauseum, about the importance of The Man. They're nice guys, they clearly love Van, and to their credit they only use the word "seminal" once, but they detract from the proceedings. The "Under Review"



Van Morrison Photo by Sean Hoffmann

of the title is no joke; this is a two-hour dissertation on the importance of George Ivan Morrison as delivered by a panel of experts. It's erudite stuff, but the talking and/or singing head I'm most interested in seeing—Van Morrison—is absent from the screen too frequently. **ANDY WHITMAN**



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