

Moore's sights set squarely on Dubya

movies



Fahrenheit 9/11
Director: Michael Moore
Screened recently at the
Auckland Film Festival
Now screening: General release

Bored and listless on the sandy streets of Iraq, American soldiers load a heavy metal CD into their tank's sound system. Seemingly unaware it might be inappropriate to take such glee in their jobs, they set the music to pipe into their helmets as they roam.

Cut to a bereaved Iraqi father carrying his dead son in his arms,

the boy's pants sodden with urine.

Cut back to a soldier, staring intently, chanting a Bloodhound Gang refrain: "We don't need no water, let the motherf***er burn. Burn motherf***er, burn."

If the memories of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal weren't so fresh, a vicious street execution in Saudi Arabia might have outranked the insensitive serviceman as the most shocking scene in *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

As it stands, the latest documentary from left-wing polemicist Michael Moore is not lacking for powerful footage.

Moore's sights are set squarely on George W. Bush. The President is in full bumbling mode, most damningly when he lingers at a school photo opportunity as planes crash into the Twin Towers.

None of the administration heavyweights escape unscathed; Bush, Rumsfeld, Powell, Cheney, Wolfowitz and Ashcroft are all depicted as corrupt, foolish, or both.

Topics range widely: the Bush family has inappropriate ties to Saudi Arabian royalty and the military-industrial complex; Bush



stole the 2000 presidential election; the USA Patriot Act permits thought-policing of fascist proportions; the case for war in Iraq was

mendacious.

At times *Fahrenheit* feels scattershot, but the unifying theme is the dangerous incompetence of

the President.

The highly-charged debate over the veracity of Moore's previous film, *Bowling for Columbine*, has been reproduced for Fahrenheit.

As it raked in the cash at the US box office, critics labelled it inaccurate and misleading.

Admittedly, even from a sympathetic left-wing perspective, Fahrenheit is often closer to propaganda than a cogent argument.

Evidence is provided for some claims but more is achieved by insinuation.

Fahrenheit offers less of Moore's prankster behaviour than his previous films or his TV series (although in one memorable scene he commandeers an ice cream truck in Washington DC to broadcast the text of the Patriot Act).

As a documentary, it's neither as slick nor as frenetic as *Bowling for Columbine*; temperamentally it's closer to the slow-burning rage of *Roger & Me*.

Michael Moore still isn't subtle, but this film is his most important work to date and he's more solemn than ever before.

— Patrick Crewdson

Coffee, cigarettes and colourful characters

movies



Coffee and Cigarettes
Director: Jim Jarmusch
Screened recently at Auckland
Film Festival
Due for Rialto release November

Jim Jarmusch's latest film *Coffee and Cigarettes* congeals eleven short episodes, filmed over the past 17 years, into one feature film.

The end result is an unconventional, humorous exploration of addiction to coffee and cigarettes, using a variety of characters, scenarios and settings.

Shot in black and white (which makes American coffee appear black and not light brown), *Coffee and Cigarettes* has an almost b-grade flavour.

There are no special effects and it is hard to describe certain people who appear in the film as 'actors'. For example, Jack and Meg White who make up the rock-blues band, the *White Stripes*.

Their wooden facial expressions and monotonous dialogue

are as exciting as substituting hot water for coffee.

But it doesn't matter — this episode only lasts ten minutes and the rest of the movie is pure Arabica beans.

On the whole, Jarmusch's script features humorous turns that are a feature of his past films (*Down By Law*, *Dead Man*, *Mystery Train* and *Night on Earth*).

An example of this is the opening episode where Roberto (Binigni) and Steven (Wright) meet at a café.

Steven convinces the caffeine overdosed Roberto to go to his dentist appointment for him.

Another humorous scene includes the strung out coffee addict Bill (Murray) who re-enacts his scene from *Groundhog*

Day where he drinks coffee straight from the coffee pot.

The episode ends with Bill receiving health advice from the Wu-Tang Clan gangster rappers, RZA and GZA.

In a further episode, an anxious Iggy (Pop) attempts to befriend an aggressive Tom (Waits) in a diner.

Tom receives countless compliments from Iggy, but somehow manages to perceive them as insults.

And the dialogue soon returns to the familiar themes of coffee and cigarettes when Tom declares that because he has given up smoking it would be fine if he had one now.

You would expect that in today's rabid anti-smoking society, a film dealing with cigarettes

as one of its themes would portray them negatively. You know, the same old crap about 'smoking is bad for you' and 'smoking causes infertility'.

But Jim Jarmusch is better than that.

Coffee and Cigarettes admirably avoids any serious health-orientated discussion about its subject matter.

Instead it concentrates on the simple appreciation of these two widely available 'drugs'.

By portraying a range of characters (black and white, rich and poor, male and female) *Coffee and Cigarettes* is like a group cinematic therapy meeting where viewers are continuously told cigarettes and coffee aren't the worst things in the world.

— Edward Gay

Good news: WTO to focus on helping the poor

movies



The Yes Men
Directors: Dan Ollman, Sarah Price and Chris Smith
Screened recently at Auckland
Film Festival
Dut for Rialto release early 2005

In a statement issued yesterday, Dr Hank Hardy Unruh of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) announced the international trade authority was accepting all its past mistakes and shutting itself down before reforming with a new focus on helping the poor and the environment.

Did you buy that?

A business conference in Sydney sure bought it when The Yes Men came to town.

"I think its really good news," cooed one journalist after hearing the above statement.

The Yes Men is a group of like-minded political activists that began when two guys started a satirical WTO website.

A documentary about them — also titled *The Yes Men* — tracks the events that occurred when the men received invitations from groups that believed it to be the actual WTO website.

The film follows Andy and Mike as they take their chance adopting pseudonyms (such as the incomparable Dr Hank Hardy Unruh) and delivering totally satirical lectures on world trade to conferences filled with PhD holders and journalists.

Armed with PowerPoint slides, op-shop suits, and 3D-animated clips, the two apprehensive, yet surprisingly camera-friendly, guys give fake lectures to media, businesspeople, scientists and academics around the world.

The alarming aspect for both the viewer and the two imposters is that no one bats an eyelid!

The supposed experts do not understand the gag. They nod and applaud a lecture on a range of topics such as a proposed market in human rights abuses, or a new WTO plan to create auction-style elections, where votes are auctioned to the highest bidder.

The film delivers serious messages beneath a veneer of hilarity and absurdity — so often the way with high-quality satire.

The Yes Men just keep pushing the line of what they can get away with.

The film comes to a satisfying conclusion when the guys announce — to a willing Sydney audience — the disintegration of the WTO as we know it.

Some of the best moments in the film come at this point as Australian journalists voice their respect for the WTO's courage in admitting it was wrong.

It is somewhat reassuring when New York students question the pair on a new WTO plan to recycle McDonald's hamburgers 10 times over to feed the Third World.

But it is less comforting when a group of Finnish academics and engineers applaud the prototype

for the hottest new management tool — the 'Corporate Leisure Suit'.

This particular part of the documentary had me wondering if it was all a set-up as it felt too absurd.

It seems unbelievable that the observers were thinking: Hey, these guys are from the World Trade Organisation, so that tight gold lycra suit he is wearing with the two-metre-long phallic attachment must be the latest cutting-edge worker management tool.

But they bought it.

The Yes Men continue to accept invitations from unwitting organisers around the world.

In doing so, it looks like many more listeners could let fancy titles distract them from the integrity of ideas being fed to them.

— Dean Campbell