

Reviews

Ondine

★★★★★

Dir. Neil Jordan. 2009. PG-13. 111mins. Colin Farrell, Alicja Bachleda, Alison Barry.

An intriguing mix of working-class grit and childlike fantasy that never fully comes together, *Ondine* stars Colin Farrell as Syracuse, a sad-eyed, scruffy Irish fisherman and divorced father who hauls the title character (Bachleda) out of the ocean one dreary morning. For most of the film, it's left up in the air as to whether she's human or whether she's, as her name implies, a legendary sea creature. Neither character is particularly forthcoming about their past—they'd rather treat the present moment as sacred and untouchable, even if it's clear that it can't last forever. Suffice to say that *Ondine* initially brings Syracuse divine riches: His nets are filled with fish, his relationship with his young daughter (Barry) is strengthened, and love blossoms. Until...

Writer-director Neil Jordan, no stranger to grounded fairy tales of this sort (see *The Butcher Boy*), has assembled a crack team of

SALTY SEAMAN
Farrell raises his nets.



collaborators. His cinematographer, the great Christopher Doyle, makes every image impressively dingy, to the point that you can practically smell the brine. And Farrell and Bachleda are a believably damaged couple, whatever the nature of their origins. But as the mystery surrounding them resolves itself, the fantastical elements feel increasingly imposed on the narrative, much as the whimsical tone of Jordan's transvestite-

comedy-cum-Irish-historical-drama, *Breakfast on Pluto*, curdled once reality came calling. The intention outweighs the execution, though there are still pleasures to be had. Jordan regular Stephen Rea shows up as a priest during a few comically tinged confessional interludes. And Sigur Rós keyboardist Kjartan Sveinsson provides a memorable score, making especially beautiful use of his band's song "All Alright." (Opens Fri.)—*Keith Uhlich*

Film of the week

Get Him to the Greek



ROLLING STONED
An absinthe-addled Hill, front, and Brand raise the roof.

★★★★★

Dir. Nicholas Stoller. 2010. R. 109mins. Jonah Hill, Russell Brand, Elisabeth Moss.

Married-rich radical M.I.A. might be having press problems these days, but they're nothing compared with the pretensions of fictional rocker Aldous Snow (squirmy, effortlessly charming Brand). *Get Him to the Greek* opens with a devastatingly

funny parody—a video for Snow's self-serious "African Child," described by shocked music critics as the worst thing to happen to the continent since apartheid. Seven years of infamy lead the debauched frontman to agree to a comeback concert, the brainstorm of superfan label-rep Aaron (Hill). After sparring with his workaholic girlfriend (*Mad Men*'s Moss, an unlikely partner), Aaron is on his way to London to shepherd Snow

to the L.A. concert, scheduled to occur in three days.

And we're off. When the movie remembers to be the drug-spiked, hard-R comedy you hope for, it's more than just a fun romp (and, incidentally, superior to *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, the rom-com from which its Britpop libertine spins off). It's an unusually fast and inventive scramble through New York TV studios and Vegas party clubs. The heavyset Hill is beginning to cultivate a likable John Candy-esque appeal; playing against the surprisingly sharp Sean Combs, as a hellacious boss, he grounds the movie in approachability as the orbiting players get crazier.

So what's with the *Almost Famous* rooftop jump and bummer left-turn? Writer-director Nicholas Stoller can't really be expecting us to view his movie as a referendum on rock & roll lifestyles; relationship arguments and daddy issues begin to cloud what started out as a perfectly black-lit satire. A climactic three-way in Aaron's apartment has less oomph than a Lars Ulrich cameo. You desperately want the movie to be bad again. (Opens Fri.)—*Joshua Rothkopf*

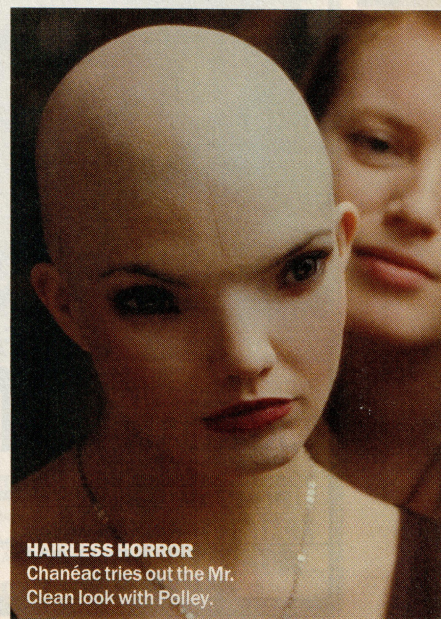
Splice

★★★★★

Dir. Vincenzo Natali. 2009. R. 104mins. Adrien Brody, Sarah Polley, Delphine Chanéac.

Clive (Brody) is a superstar geneticist who dresses like a hipster rock musician. Girlfriend Elsa (Polley)—the brainiac Nancy Spungen to his Sid Vicious—works with DNA as if it had a shake, rattle and roll melody to harness. Their latest experiment, done on the sly, produces Dren (Chanéac), a test-tube hybrid of animal and human genes who looks like she could have stepped out of a Chris Cunningham video. Clive and Elsa treat her like an accidental child—dearly loved at some moments, roundly hated at others. But with her accelerated growth rate (she's an adult about a month after birth), she should be out of their hair soon enough, and science will be the better for it.

If you've seen *Species*, you know where this don't-mess-with-Mother-Nature horror show is going, though director-cowriter Vincenzo Natali has a few interesting twists up his sleeve. The best of these approach Cronenbergian levels of perversity (the line "inside you!" will be forever etched in your memory). But despite the game cast, everything feels derivative of other, superior films. The sole exception is a sequence set at a stockholders' meeting, during which more of Clive and Elsa's creations (two amorphous sentient blobs called "Fred" and "Ginger") do a bloody dance of death. Like their namesakes, they steal the show, though their crimson carioca is, sadly, a one-time-only deal. (Opens Fri.)—*Keith Uhlich*



HAIRLESS HORROR
Chanéac tries out the Mr. Clean look with Polley.