DVDs released this week like loot bag at hit-or-miss party

McCLATCHEY TRIBUNE

It's a gloriously mixed bag this week - a certified Oscar contender, an interesting independent Academy wannabe, a collection of revamped classics and an overlooked effort that had the unfortunate luck of being the second in the "Truman Capote"/"In Cold Blood" sweepstakes. Toss in another failed Hollywood comedy (someone should keep a running total on the number of these lackluster laughfests the industry releases each year) and an unusual documentary, and you've got a nice selection of cinema to choose from. So break open the piggy bank, plan your purchase strategy carefully and choose between these Feb. 13 releases:

"The Departed"

As the illustrious LL Cool J once warned, don't call it a comeback. Indeed, Martin Scorsese has not been hiding along the fringes of cinema, waiting for another certified gangster blockbuster to resurrect his implied lagging artistic credibility.

Since his last film, "The Aviator," was nominated for several Oscars, it seems silly to suggest that the certified American auteur is arriving from anywhere but the top. Besides, some of his best films - "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore," "The King of Comedy," "The Last Temptation of Christ" - have nothing to do with mean streets and goodfellas.

This does not lesson the impact or import of this brilliant Boston crime drama - no one does operatic brutality better - but Scorsese is much more than A movie mob boss. He doesn't deserve such stereotyping.

OTHER TITLES OF INTEREST:

"Bicycle Thieves: Criterion Collection"

It's the height of post-War desperation in Italy. Citizens are still in shock over how Fascism has failed them. Then light-comedy filmmaker Vittorio De Sica decides to explore the devastation from the inside out. The result was this seminal example of neo-realism, made even more important by the new presentation from the preservation experts.

"Half Nelson"

Inner-city teacher Dan Dunne (Ryan Gosling) leads a lamentable double life. By day he enthralls his lower-income students. By night he's a raging crackhead. When the two worlds collide, an unusual sort of relationship is the result. What could be a sappy after school special is saved by brilliant acting and a no-holds-barred approach to its subject.

"Infamous"

Writer/director Douglas McGrath and his wonderful all-star cast deserved better than to be considered a Capote afterthought. Indeed, this far sunnier look at the author behind "In Cold Blood" and the crime that would alter his life forever is more playful - and powerful - than the more sober, somber Oscar winner.

"Paul Robeson - Portrait of the Artist: Criterion Collection"

He was Ivy League educated, sang opera as well as popular songs and was considered a real Renaissance man - an amazing triumph for a member of a beleaguered race at the turn of the century.

Thanks to Criterion, Robeson's career as an actor (which he ended early, arguing that there were no good roles for blacks) can now be reviewed for all to see and celebrate.

"School for Scoundrels"

Proving that it will be tough to overcome his pitch-perfect performance in "Napoleon Dynamite," Jon Heder follows up his equally unimpressive turn in "The Benchwarmers" with this dopey relationships comedy. While Billy Bob Thorton obviously enjoys doing these kind of over-the-top slop comedies, we expect better from the man who made geeks groovy. Sadly, there is more horror than humor here.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT:

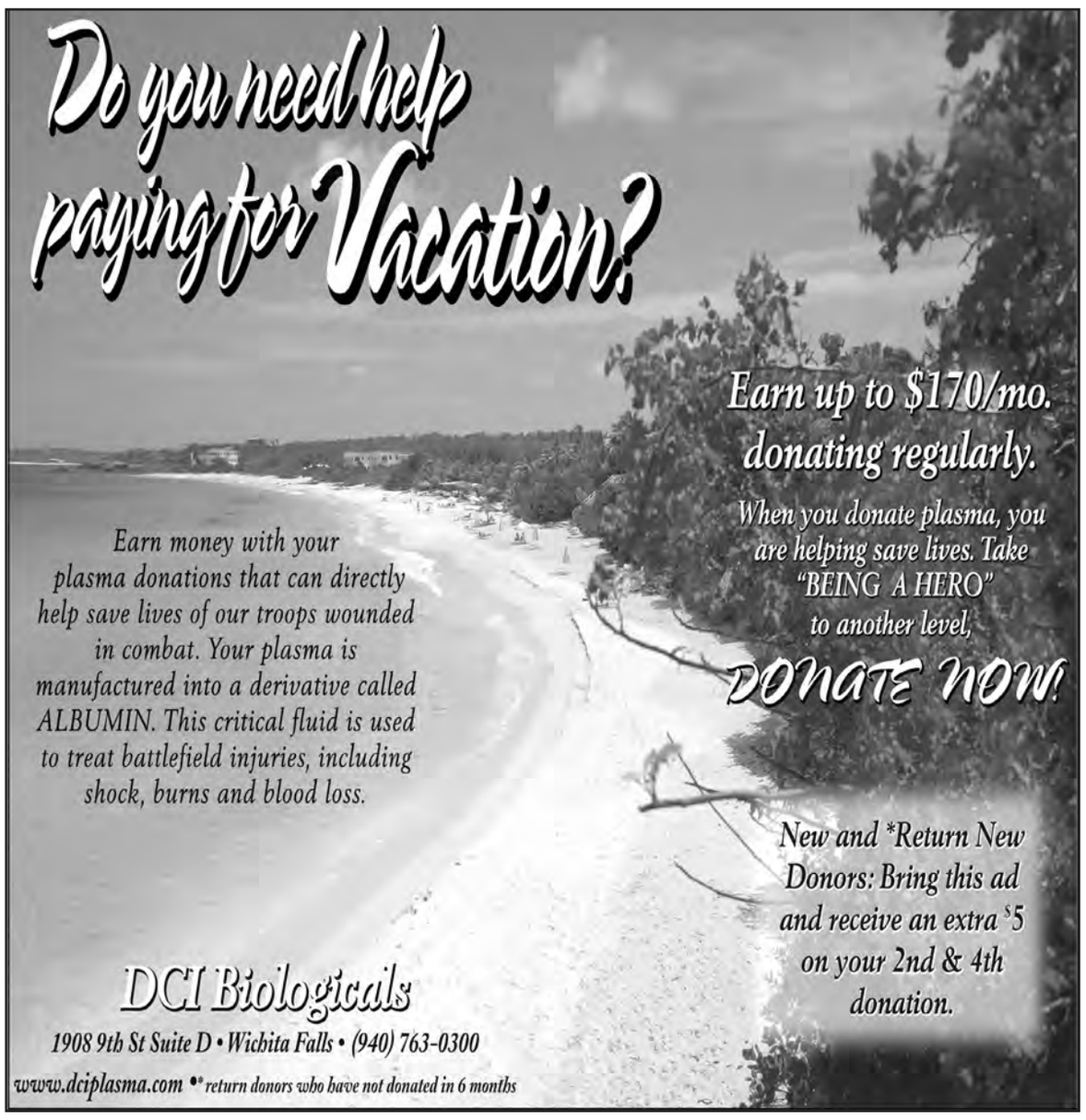
"The U.S. vs. John Lennon"

In one of the strangest cases in the history of the federal government, the Nixon administration, in connection with Hoover's hated FBI, conspired to deport ex-Beatle John Lennon over his pronounced peacenik views.

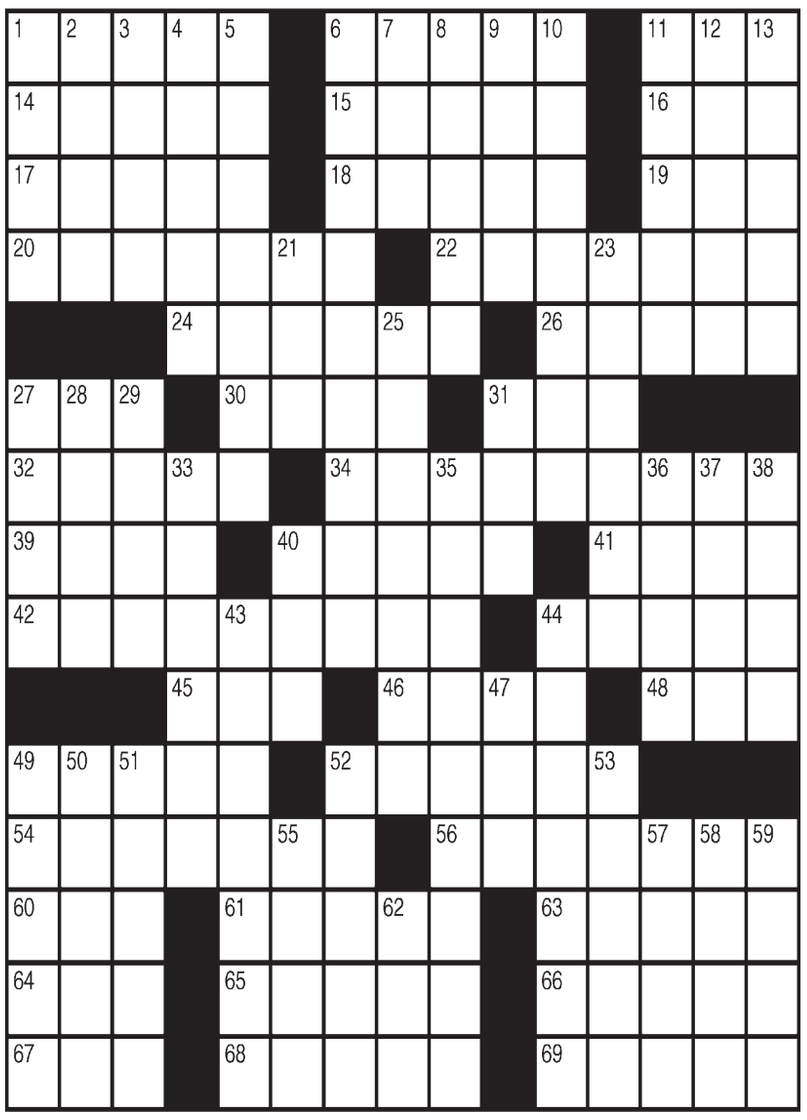
Along with his obvious influence among the young and his ability to continuously capture the attention of the media, Lennon was the loose cannon the ebbing pro-Vietnam establishment couldn't control. The way they went about their plan, however, failed to do anything but further damage an already reeling leadership.

Now, thanks to the Freedom of Information Act and a decision to contextualize Lennon's cultural import, filmmakers David Leaf and John Scheinfeld have created a composite of one man and his undeniable impact on the society that surrounded him. While his death remains the biggest disgrace to his legacy, this chapter is equally embarrassing.

"The Departed" makes its way onto DVD as it prepares for the Academy Awards.



Crossword



ACROSS
1 Hilo hello
6 Hereditary social group
11 Mormon letters
14 Unconscious states
15 Sharif and Epps
16 Bullpen stat
17 Bad deeds
18 Composition for nine
19 WWII soldiers
20 Temporary routes
22 Stiff felt hats
24 Kills, old-style
26 Gene of oaters
27 Flow out
30 Corn units
31 Dog tags
32 Love of money
34 Repetition
39 Intestinal fortitude
40 Operation reminders
41 Solitary
42 Figurine
44 Program choices
45 Tolkien's talking tree
46 Hosiery shade
48 Guinness Book suffix
49 Zodiac sign
52 Shrewd
54 Article of clothing
56 Most tidy
60 Writer Levin
61 Eagle's nest
63 English ruling dynasty
64 Court call
65 Light haircuts
66 "Frasier" pooch
67 Before, in verse
68 Dove and Ivory
69 Bargains

DOWN
1 Made a hole in one
2 Valentine word
3 Leave out
4 Saintly glows
5 Took for granted
6 Do the boa thing
7 Latin I lesson word
8 Uses emery
9 Sequoia or sycamore
10 Erik of "CHiPs"
11 On the up-and-up
12 Paint additive
13 Pert
21 Small inlet
23 Ado
25 Stuff of wills
27 Breakfast choice
28 Very dry, as champagne
29 Second of a series
31 Apr. addressee
33 High regard
35 Upright stance
36 Actress Skye
37 Burden
38 Brooding place
40 Harden
43 Defeats an incumbent
44 Changed
47 Regret
49 Nimble
50 Less common
51 Really angry
52 Open courtyards
53 Practice piece of music
55 Actor Franco
57 Icelandic saga
58 Begrime
59 Vichy very
62 Little devil

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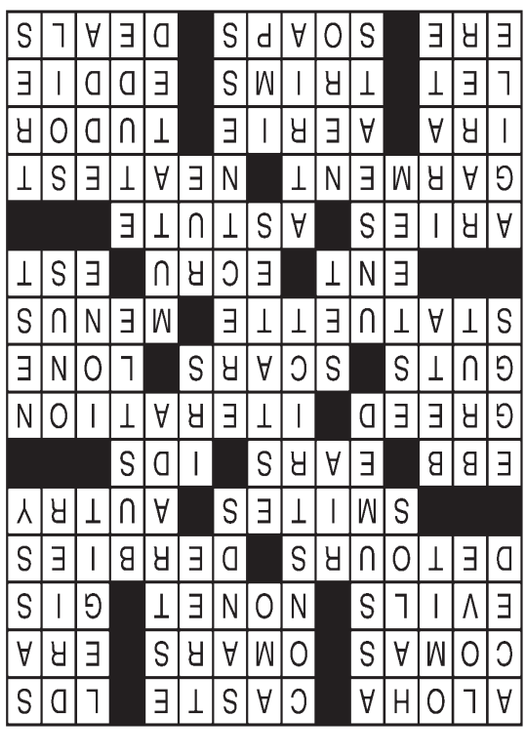
Solutions



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Happy Valentine's Day From The Wichitan! We hope you get some... Candy! Yeah, candy.

Be sure to grab a copy next week as Kimbro will be reviewing "Ghost Rider" starring Nicholas Cage.