

Oscars

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ity" for the screen. (She was named best actress for "Howard's End" in 1992.)

The English actress told of visiting Austen's grave at Winchester Cathedral "to pay my respects and tell her about the grosses."

She concluded by dedicating her award to Ang Lee, who directed the film but was overlooked for a nomination although the film was up for best picture.

Supporting actor awards went to Kevin Spacey, the verbal con man in "The Usual Suspects," and Mira Sorvino, who played a hooker in "Mighty Aphrodite."

Spacey thanked his mother for driving him to acting classes when he was 16: "I told you it would pay off, and here's the pudding."

Sorvino thanked her father as the veteran actor openly sobbed in the audience. "When you give me this award you honor my father, Paul Sorvino, who taught me everything I know about acting," she said.

The elder Sorvino, a character ac-

tor, has appeared in TV's "Law & Order," and the movie "Goodfellas," among others.

This year's biggest controversy surfaced immediately. Host Whoopi Goldberg used her opening monologue to defuse the Rev. Jesse Jackson's call to protest the show because there was only one black out of 166 nominees.

Jackson led about 75 marchers outside the Hollywood offices of KABC-TV across town from the award ceremonies.

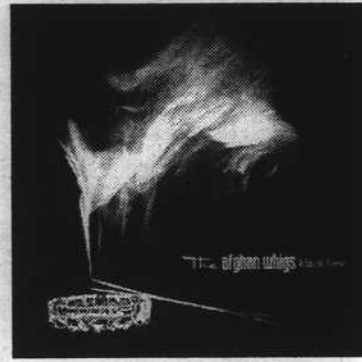
The academy passed over black filmmaker Dianne Houston's "Tuesday Morning Ride" in the live action short film category, choosing "Lieberman in Love," from Jana Sue Memel and actress Christine Lahti of television's "Chicago Hope."

In other awards, "Restoration" won for costume and art direction, and "Apollo 13" for film editing and sound. "Babe" took the visual effects Oscar. "Antonia's Line" scored honors as the best foreign language picture.

Two films about the Holocaust won in their respective categories, documentary short and documentary feature — "One Survivor Remembers" and "Anne Frank Remembered."

Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz won two — for best original musical or comedy score for "Pocahontas" and the movie's top song, "Colors of the Wind." The original score statuette went to "The Postman."

Music Reviews



The Afghan Whigs "Black Love"
Elektra
Grade: A

The biggest danger of making an album that is almost perfect is that the next one — no matter how good — always seems like a letdown.

Such was the case faced by the Afghan Whigs after 1993's "Gentlemen," a masterpiece that signified the culmination of Greg Dulli's years of tinkering with old forms of soul music and new strains of layered punk.

Enter "Black Love." The bad news is that it's not as good as "Gentlemen." The good news is that it's still really good.

Starting where "Gentlemen" left off, "Black Love" delves further into the tormented mind and antagonistic love life of Dulli. And while this journey's subjects aren't always pleasant, the approaches to them contain a mysterious, dark ray of beauty.

Dulli's rants on the twisted paths of love and hate would almost approach misogyny if not for the equally powerful elements of self-deprecation that back every word.

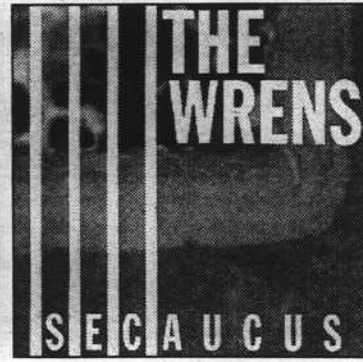
Juxtaposing lyrics such as "come crucify my heart" with brash inserts such as "I wanna get it on" is a rarely assumed risk by most songwriters, but Dulli takes the risk and, fortunately, pulls it off.

That's the lyrical side. Musically, "Black Love" follows the path its name might indicate. Just as soul masters such as Sam Cooke and Otis Redding moved tried-and-true gospel music into the then-new genre of soul in the 1960s, the Whigs mix guitar rock and flashy soul rhythm lines into a new genre — white-boy soul.

"Double Day" runs along the same path as Marvin Gaye's confessional seduction in "I Want You," taking the depravity of a desperate individual and making it sound like pure, innocent emotion.

At the very least, "Black Love" is a brief oasis between Isaac Hayes and Al Green albums. At best, it's the top album of 1996 — so far.

— Jeff Randall



The Wrens "Secaucus"
Grass Records
Grade: B

British bands make me nauseous. The Wrens, however, present a nice version of Jolly Old England via New Jersey. The band's efforts, coupled with those of Guided By Voices, make the blokes a bit easier to stomach.

So as to avoid any confusion, it should be noted that despite its sweet harmonizing and bouncy tempos, the band is thankfully nothing like Oasis. Rather, Gregory Whelan and the boys are rooted in punk ideology and blessed with a creativity that escapes hacks like Blur.

Riding a wave of college radio interest with the hooky "Rest Your Head," its newest release, "Secaucus" arrives on the heels of 1994's 23-track dynamo, "Sliver." For the most part, the skyline is dotted with the same sneering, sometimes interesting rock that populated songs like "Darlin' Darlin'," "Behold Me" and "Kevin's Hell."

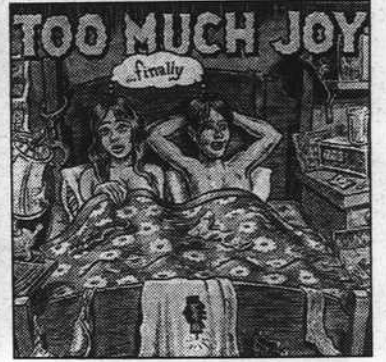
The banging, swerving construction that captured the interests of the like-minded Saddle Creek scene is reborn in tracks like "Luxury." Furthermore, the sensitivity toyed with on "William" also reappears in "Jane Fakes a Hug" and "Destruction/Drawn."

This 60-minute offering, however, is lacking in its variety. It could be argued that the Wrens are solidifying their sound, concentrating their talents on ditties like "Yellow Number Three." Whatever their motivations, by eliminating the cuteness of "Minion," the quirk of "Dakota," and the jazzy flavor of "Grey Complexion," they've lessened their appeal. Sebadoh's "III" is Lou's best album for a reason — it's the most diverse.

Overall, this release is a bit of a disappointment. Though the band only loosely adhered to the indie sound to begin with, it has strayed even further, indulging even more in slick overproduction and Beatlesque pop formulas. The subtlety of the band's music has dwindled even further, widening the rift between its mediocrity and genius.

Whatever the case, unlike "Sliver," at least this record refrains from lyrics such as "any clitoris down below." That's definitely a plus.

— Matt Kudlacz



Too Much Joy "... Finally"
Discovery Records
Grade: A-

"... Finally" is a very appropriate title. It's about time Too Much Joy released a new record.

If you aren't familiar with TMJ, it is one of the best power-punk-pop smart-aleck bands in America. It has, however, been sadly absent for almost four years.

During that time, it has changed labels, lost the bassist (he's now a big-wig over at Atlantic Records) and drafted its producer into the band.

All that's really important, however, is that the band's back, with its first new album since "Mutiny." Finally, TMJ released a new album; and it is good.

Thirteen songs make up the fun-filled album. The first single, "The Kids Don't Understand," shows both where TMJ has come from and where it is going.

The only non-TMJ song on the record is a cover of Billy Bragg's "A New England," which seems almost custom-made for TMJ's revved-up style, but also makes you wonder if the members have changed their mind since they recorded "Long-Haired Guys From England," back on "Cereal Killers."

"You Will" is definitely the best song on the album, however, parodying the AT&T commercials that are on television all the time. "Have you ever known such bliss? / You will — and you will not be scared / Seen our logo on the moon? / You will — and will you not be thrilled?"

There's no "In Perpetuity" (an all-acoustic song from "Mutiny") on "... Finally" though. If you find yourself craving a little calmer TMJ, you can count on "Mutiny" to provide the perfect counterpoint.

What makes TMJ so successful, besides the catchy melodies and brain-tickling lyrics, is the disarmingly charming voice of lead singer Tim Quirk. He comes across as honest and friendly, if not a little peculiar. He's just ... you know, Quirky.

"... Finally" is definitely an album that grows on you. The first time through, it's overwhelming, almost too much to handle. But after repetitive listening, the brain becomes convinced there's no such thing as too much Too Much Joy.

— Cliff Hicks

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