

Movie Review

## Campion gives classic story modern touch

By **BRET SCHULTE**  
Film Critic

Another year, another adaptation. In 1995 we were brought Jane Austen's "Sense and Sensibility" and more Austen with the 1996 release of "Emma." 1997 has something entirely different in store, however, with the brilliant modern re-telling of Henry James' classic, "The Portrait of a Lady."

As she struggles with numerous suitors, Isabel Archer, craftily embraced by the radiant Nicole Kidman, simply wants to feel alive. An American expatriate, she resides with her amazingly wealthy English relatives. When her uncle dies, she is left with a fortune and can live her life free from commitments and societal restraints — which she does, for a while.

While shrugging off several adamant courtiers, the bold and independent Miss Archer gallivants around Europe, where she is introduced to Gilbert Osmond by an ambiguously evil mutual friend, Madame Merley (Barbara Hershey). John Malkovich presents another unforgettable character in Gilbert Osmond, a cold, manipulative and recreant Parisian. Osmond feigns affection toward Isabel while his piercing intelligence and odd ways intrigue her and eventually ensnare her.

The film moves rapidly, often jumping several years at a time, documenting Archer's descent from independence and grace to submission at the will of her husband. The pacing works well, and director Jane Campion has an eye for indulgence and nuance that is skillfully used in the design of the film.

From the art-film opening to the freeze-frame ending, "The Portrait of a Lady" transcends most rather limited adaptations of classic works. Campion's distinctly feminist-enlightenment



PHOTO COURTESY OF GRAMERCY PICTURES  
**NICOLE KIDMAN and John Malkovich star as Isabel Archer and her oppressive husband Gilbert Osmond in the Jane Campion film "The Portrait of a Lady."**

position (see art-film hit "The Piano") is an absolutely essential element to the development of Archer and the film representation of her life. And it is only such insight that can be offered by such a director that could carry this film to a new level of emotional and artistic altitude.

Campion, refusing to produce a rigid, plastic adaptation of a powerful work, has created a modern, flowing piece using contemporary directorial style and editing. This classic tale is brought to a modern audience through prolonged close-ups, strikingly artistic camera work and surprise elements of sexual fantasy and surreal-

ism. It is clear that limitations do not reside in the work itself, only in the one who interprets it. Campion knows no limitations.

While many may feel that a film of this type is for an older audience, this story of fierce female independence, transgression and ultimate triumph is a pointedly modern and applicable film. Through a story of this kind we realize to what degree the role of women in our world has changed, and how it hasn't. For while we have instituted suffrage, legal equality and political correctness, women still suffer oppression from a variety of sources, frequently their husbands.

The Facts

**Film:** "The Portrait of a Lady"  
**Stars:** Nicole Kidman, John Malkovich, Barbara Hershey, Mary-Louise Parker  
**Director:** Jane Campion  
**Rating:** PG-13 (Brief nudity)  
**Grade:** A  
**Five Words:** More like interpretation than adaptation

## Southern storm



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ZOO BAR

Tinsley Ellis (above) will bring the blues to the Zoo Bar, 136 N. 14 St., tonight. Ellis, an Atlanta native who was raised on Southern blues, rock and R&B, is touring in support of his latest album, "Storm Warning." The album is on the Alligator Records label and features Ellis on guitar and vocals. The song list includes six Ellis originals, as well as covers of blues classics such as "Early in the Morning" (originally by Junior Wells) and "Side Tracked" (originally by Freddie King).

Ellis' own compositions on the album include "Wanted Man," which features the recording debut of 14-year-old slide guitarist Derek Trucks.

As far as sonic descriptions go, Ellis wavers somewhere between the deep soul of Delta blues and the more upbeat styles of Chicago and jump blues. Ellis prefers to call it "Southeast blues."

Ellis will take the stage at the Zoo at 9:30 p.m.

Movie Review

## Spoof of martial arts flicks typical Farley fare

By **GERRY BELTZ**  
Film Critic

Let's see. Destruction of fragile valuables, huge amounts of self-inflicted pain, and a star with the grace and delicateness of a World War II tank, all very loosely woven around a paper-thin, overused plot.

And still people laugh and laugh and laugh. Yep, "Beverly Hills Ninja" is a Chris Farley flick.

Ninjitsu — an art of stealth, cunning and mystery — is perfect fodder for Farley's self-destructive style of humor. Throw in some basic martial arts weaponry (bo and jo staves, three-sectioned staff, shuriken) and the cinematic snobbery of Beverly Hills. SPLACK! You have a movie for the masses who loved the "Ace Ventura" flicks.

For centuries, a secret clan of ninjas has trained in its unique art. Then, a child from a foreign land joined the clan, and this child was destined to become not just a Ninja, but a really, really good Ninja!

Unfortunately, the ninjas got Haru (Farley) instead.

His mission? Stop the counterfeiters, save the girl and discover the abilities he has hidden within himself.

(Counterfeiters? Where did they come from? Ah, who cares? Look! Farley bumped his head again! HAR HAR HAR!!!!)

Director Dennis Dugan had the right idea to make a movie succeed — just let Farley run around and slam his head and body into various inanimate objects.

The first 10 minutes or so of "Beverly Hills Ninja" do provide a couple of laughs for anyone who has seen more than four martial arts



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRISTAR PICTURES  
**CHRIS FARLEY stars as Haru, an orphan raised by ninjas, who believes himself to be the legendary Great White Ninja in "BEVERLY HILLS NINJA."**

flicks in their lifetimes. The "pick-up-the-burning-pot" scene actually was funny, even if it was predictable.

It's nice seeing Robin Shou again. He is a truly gifted martial artist, and his fight scene toward the end, while fairly normal, was a nice break from the rest of the movie.

Chris Rock also shows up as a valet at Haru's hotel, but his presence is virtually wasted.

It's an utterly stupid movie, but some people like stupid, so some people will like "Beverly Hills Ninja."

The Facts

**Film:** "Beverly Hills Ninja"  
**Stars:** Chris Farley, Robin Shou, Nicolette Sheridan,  
**Director:** Dennis Dugan  
**Rating:** PG (mild toilet humor)  
**Grade:** D  
**Five Words:** Clumsy twit practices martial arts