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Holiday flicks could move to forefront

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON

The golden Oscars, Globes and critics' awards are there for the taking.

That's the general attitude of the holiday movie season, which begins in earnest one day before Thanksgiving - Wednesday. It's time to roll out the art, the award winners.

Last year, 1999, was an anomaly as the critic grand slams ("American Beauty," "The Insider" and "The Sixth Sense") rolled down the movie carpet in late summer and early fall.

Fall 2000 was a dead zone - bad times plus a couple of flops, a basic mirror of the entire year so far after 1999, which might have been the movie year of the last two decades.

To date in the new century, few, if any, films have set a beeline for definite award pickups save "Gladiator," whose massive scope and sword-and-sandal epic revival play favorably into the hands of many voters. "Erin Brockovich," and certainly Julia Roberts' va-voom title role, will attract serious attention.

So these holidays are a real pressure cooker from here on, especially as an impending writers' strike and poor box returns to date have put studios on watch.

So here's a look at the contenders and the purely fun stuff (must-see rankings out of 4 stars):

Oscar heavies:

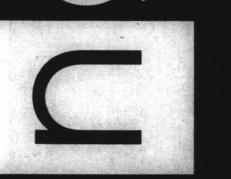
"Unbreakable" (Nov. 22) - Toward the end of his "The Sixth Sense," director/writer M. Night Shyamalan began to write his fourth movie. He scrapped the whole idea for a different tale, which will make it to screen here - an Everyman (Bruce Willis) survives a horrible train crash unharmed while a mysteriously brittle comic-book fiend (Samuel L. Jackson) attempts to discover why.

The premise seems outstanding, and Shyamalan's artsy style (What's with the long overhead shots and slow focus work?) creates a distinctive look. But the cocky 30year-old director (he shoots sequence, he's basically guaranteed this as a masterpiece) is hit-and-miss. Could be a haunting won-

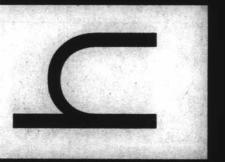
der. Could be a brooding mess. **** "Quills" (Nov. 22) – Phillip Kaufman's epic on the final days of Marquis De Sade, played by Geoffery Rush, as he writes into a scandal from the loop house. Kate Winslet is his faithful nurse. *** 1/2

"Finding Forrester" (Dec. 6) - And this













doctoral degree in piano per-**Beginning** with native Cuba. studied piano in



Love of music helps musician past problems with homeland

My grandmother gets all the credit." Rodriguez said in

"When they told me I had to go back (to Cuba), I said: `I'm not going," I told them I have a right to finish my studies.

ar's entry in being full of blarney Van Sant's follow-up to "Good Will Hunting" (a lot of hot air that was) finds a budding writer searching out a reclusive genius (Sean Connery), who wrote the great American novel, then walked into a sliver flat in the Bronx. The kid can play basketball like a whiz, too. Another genius-inmaking tale. ** 1/2

"Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (Dec. 8) - Who isn't rooting for a martialarts drama starring Chow Yun-Fat and

Please see MOVIES on 6















But Rodriguez said the positives of her decision outweigh the negatives. She was able to complete her study in Russia and then had the opportunity to continue in the

For Cuban students, the only study abroad option lies in Russia.

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in a chamber-music setting.

pleasure to hear play and to have as a student."

said, it is more of a mutual, give-and-take playing relationship.

"She'd be a great teacher as well as performer," Barnes said.

Story by Josh Nichols 🔤 Photos by Sharon Kolbet