

# WENDY IDE finds that Neil Young is cloyingly nostalgic in Jonathan Demme's concert film

## Neil Young: Heart of Gold

PG, 110 mins  
★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

## Man Push Cart

15, 87 mins  
★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

## Accepted

12A, 94 mins  
★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

## Rabbit on the Moon

18, 104 mins  
★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

## The Pervert's Guide to Cinema

n/c, 150 mins  
★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

When, in the spring of 2005, the singer-songwriter Neil Young was found to have a brain aneurysm, he responded with a burst of creativity. In the few weeks between his diagnosis and the operation that would save his life, he wrote and recorded an album, *Prairie Wind*. We are given this much context for the concert movie **Neil Young: Heart of Gold** in a few snatched and mostly rather banal interviews with his long-time collaborators in the initial minutes of the picture. The rest of the film is entirely composed of concert footage, captured by the director Jonathan Demme over two evening performances of the new material and some old at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee.

Practically the only words we hear from Young are the lyrics to his songs and the yarns he spins to a rapt audience between them. This is all about the music, and the musicianship is exemplary. But the performance is as safe and comforting as a patchwork quilt. It's a stark contrast to Demme's previous concert film, the dark, dynamic Talking Heads movie *Stop Making Sense*.

Understandably, Young was jolted by his illness to look back and take stock of his life. Much of the new material deals with his mortality, or nostalgia for youth and health. But his anecdotes are of the

soft-focus and sentimental variety; sun-drenched memories of growing up on "Daddy's chicken farm". It's an idealised Americana as cloyingly insincere as a Norman Rockwell painting.

That said, there are moments that grab you – little catches in Young's unique semi-strangled delivery that sound like a yelp of raw emotion. But there's nothing here that adds up to a cinematic experience and nothing you'll gain from watching the film in a movie theatre rather than on DVD.

Films that deal with the plight of immigrants tend to brandish their issue-led status like a placard. Not so **Man Push Cart**, a quietly articulate study of a Pakistani former singer's life in New York as a street vendor providing Manhattanites with their daily caffeine fix. It's not just the subsistence-level struggle for survival that grinds him down but also the cruel stab of meeting compatriots whose lives in this

## Accepted does salvage decent laughs from the campus mayhem and bikini babes

demanding city are markedly better than his. This low-key drama by the writer/director Ramin Bahrani uses rhythm and repetition very effectively – Ahmad's gruelling routine of hauling his truck through the buffeting early morning traffic punctuates the film.

The sad-eyed protagonist always finds himself distanced from life in the city – he's an observer gazing at the streets through the serving hatch of his cart; at the girl he yearns for through the ticket booth of a club; at his estranged in-laws through their window. Assimilation is not always easy.

**Accepted** is a fifth or sixth-generation rip-off of

the riotous frat-anarchy tradition that dates back to *Animal House*. In the lead role of Bartleby Gaines, an entrepreneurial slacker, is someone called Justin Long. So to recap, that's no new ideas and a cast of nobodies. Unpromising as that sounds, the movie does manage to salvage several decent laughs from the gratuitous footage of campus mayhem and jiggling bikini babes. These are thanks largely to Jonah Hill's sweaty, angst-ridden turn as Sherman Schrader, Bartleby's neurotic best buddy. But wait for the DVD, if you really must.

A British/Mexican co-production, **Rabbit on the Moon** is a heavy-handed story of a young couple (she, played by Lorraine Pilkington, is British, her husband is Mexican) who find themselves embroiled in nefarious underworld activities. It's the kind of film where simple exchanges of dialogue have to haul chunks of exposition like concrete boots. Mexico City is a striking backdrop but it has been put to far more effective use by such films as *Amores Perros*.

**The Pervert's Guide to Cinema**, the documentary directed by Sophie Fiennes, has already been shown on television, but warrants its cinematic release. The Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek is a playful and provocative host. His ideas on cinema may not be revolutionary (there's a bit of a Freudian bias), they may not even be right, but his exuberant delivery will encourage you to look at film in a different way. Fiennes wittily transposes Žižek into reproductions of scenes from the films he discusses. Bewhiskered, and with an academic's dress sense, he bobs around in Tippi Hedren's boat from *The Birds*. However although there are nods to the blockbusters, Žižek is happiest talking about old favourites – Hitchcock, Lynch, Tarkovsky and Kieslowski. I'd love to hear what he would find to say about something lowbrow – *Accepted*, for example.