

The Governor-General's Awards, back from boring with bold choices, Jennifer Dale, in a fetching red dress in the panto *Aladdin*, and the film *Love, Sex & Eating the Bones*, particularly if we could ditch the title. Some things are just so . . .

under rated



The Governor-General's Awards. Since the arrival of their show-biz-savvy younger cousin the Giller Prize 11 years ago, the G-Gs have seemed intent on reviving themselves. The winners are no longer a sure thing: Witness Miriam Toews's heartbreaking *A Complicated Kindness* beating Alice Munro's *Runaway* in the fiction category this year, or Douglas Glover's wild *Elle* snatching top honours away from Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* last year. The ceremony itself has also become a hot ticket. The G-G reception dinner, a stylish, private do at Rideau Hall, is opulent without being ostentatious, with guests free to mingle or tour the public rooms and grounds. It's a coziness and liberty denied Giller Prize attendees, who are crammed into Toronto's four Seasons Hotel and



Gallery but it was still distressing that nobody came at all.

Perhaps it's not all that surprising, however painful it may have been. Goodwin deals directly and majestically with ideas—difficult and disturbing ideas: Much of her work touches on suffering and silence, oppression and on the endless fallout of the Holocaust. The trouble is, profundity isn't big these days. Anguish, I think, is considered just a bit tasteless right now. And despair is regarded as a sort of faux pas. — *Gary Michael Dault*

corruption in city politics. There is something rotten in the mayor's office, in the behaviour of the new chief of police, and canny coroner Dominic Da Vinci (Nicholas Campbell) is very aware of the stench. It's superbly gripping entertainment and caustic social commentary. — *John Doyle*

Rune Arltidge. Michael Healey's *Rune Arltidge* may not have ignited the same critical and theatrical fire that *The Drawer Boy* has, but it's one of the year's bravest and least-compromising plays. It challenged our assumptions about investing emotionally in characters; life as a narrative of progress; and love as the guiding principle for human relationships. — *Karol Al-Sakerjee*

Amy Winehouse. The sassy British singer's posthumous release of her

Lella Getz. Ever since the former piano teacher from South Africa founded the Vancouver Recital Society—with no previous impresario experience whatsoever—Vancouverites have come to trust her instincts implicitly. It was Getz, after all, who first introduced audiences to violinists Joshua Bell and Maxim Vengerov, pianist Andras Schiff, cellist Steven Isserlis and soprano Cecilia Bartoli, long before they become major stars.

The recital society and its summer chamber-music festival have become vital parts of Vancouver's cultural life. And Getz, although not recognized as widely as she should be, is one of the best musical scouts in the business. — *Alexandra Gill*



From top, down: Scenes from the play *Rune Arltidge* and the film *Love, Sex & Eating the Bones*

Michael Blake. He's the other Canadian saxophonist and composer named Blake in New York these days. Seamus Blake has had the high-profile gigs and won the awards, but our man Michael has quietly assembled a comparably impressive and more varied discography.



cung them to leave their seats during their broadcast of the ceremony. — *Rebecca Caldwell*

Jennifer Dale. Jennifer, at exactly the same time as her sister Cynthia's Stratford openings and just under the radar, delivered a little miracle of a performance in her one-woman show *Dave*, based on the life of Italian actress Eleonora Duse, at the Tarragon Extra Space. She then rounded out the year with a sly and commanding turn as the genie in a fetching red dress in *Aladdin*, the best part to Ross Petty has done in... well, ever. — *Kamal Al-Solaylee*

Reality Television. Looking for original characters, unusual predicaments and an investigation of human behaviour at the extremes? Then why are you wasting your time wading in the familiar dishwater of *Everybody Loves Raymond* or *CSI*? If that *Fear Factor* episode where the contestants stick their faces in a bucket of cow eyeballs had taken place on *The Sopranos*, the critics would have called it *Art*. What three-grand a week sitcom hack could have invented creatures as vain, bed-bug crazy and entertaining as Donald Trump or Tyra Banks? — *Liam Lacey*

Love, Sex & Eating the Bones. Overwrought title, undecorated picture. In *Love, Sex & Eating the Bones*, writer-director Suzi Sutherland made the sort of Canadian movie that Canadian audiences claim to want — largely entertaining yet different from the Hollywood fluff, a breezy picture that is unmistakably us. Putting a fresh coat of paint on that cracked edifice known as the romance comedy, Sutherland combines a flair for dialogue with a feel for the camera, and the result is a lot more than a feature debut that shows promise. It's a fulfilled feature, period. Better yet, although the plot's amorous couple is black, their characterization here (unlike the U.S. model) is neither colour-saturated nor colour-blind, but emerges quietly and organically out of the script, bubbling up with a natural effervescence that seems uniquely, yes, Canadian. So, for once, we got just what we supposedly wish for — and few seemed to notice. Lower to care. — *Rick Green*

Da Vinci's Inquest. CBC Television's long running drama has improved from season to season. With the seventh season (and with creator Chris Haddock back from his sojourn in U.S. network TV), *Da Vinci's Inquest* is reborn as a hard, subtly angry thriller about power and

for sheer cleverness and brio, her best songs deserve to be mentioned in the same breath as Cole Porter's. She can put them over, too, with a tone that's by turn brassy, coy and implacable, like a North London avatar of the spirits of Sarah Vaughan and Nina Simone. And she's just 21. Winehouse has had plenty of attention in Britain, where she snagged two Brit Award nominations, an Ivor Novello songwriting award, and a nomination for the Mercury Prize (won by the more genial Franz Ferdinand). But even in the U.K. her record hasn't done nearly as well as discs by less gifted singers living off the avails of nu-soul and snooze-jazz. A pity. This is one smart woman you really should meet. — *Robert Everett-Green*



NFB short documentary *Hardwood*. Father-son relationships and basketball could make this beautifully filmed, half-hour short sound like a National Film Board version of *He Got Game*. Instead, in a directorial debut by Hubert Davis, it's a quiet look at his father Mel Davis, a former Harlem Globetrotter, and the choices he faced after falling in love with a white woman in the still-racially intolerant 1960s. In what was a particularly strong year for the NFB, this short, understated film was among the best. — *Guy Dorn*

The Nine Planets. Newfoundland's Edward Riche has the pedigree: His 1997 debut book *Rays Birds*, a force about a struggling restaurateur, won him a huge following among reviewers and readers alike. But his follow-up book *The Nine Planets*, a satire about a man trying to establish a new private school, thrilled the critics but hasn't yet broken out in the bookstores. — *Rebecca Caldwell*

Betty Goodwin. Maybe it was because everybody seemed to know that, being 81 and not very well, the veteran Montreal-based sculptor/painter Betty Goodwin would probably not attend her opening in November at Toronto's Sable-Castelli

*don of *Champion, Slow Poke, Drift* and *Elevation*, he has balanced imagination and tradition deftly and respectfully, allowing neither to get the upper hand over the other. Blake, now 40, slipped out of Canada in 1966, and has slipped back in several times since, but without the sort of fanfare that should accompany the return of one of the most intriguing Canadians in jazz. He was leading Blake Tartare with three musicians from Copenhagen on his most recent visit this past summer; all too typically, only a few of the country's myriad festivals gave the quartet a tumble. — *Mark Miller**

Maisonneuve magazine. All the fuss and rumble about the coming of *The Walrus* diverted many eyes from a nimbler new mag based in Montreal. *Maisonneuve* finished its second year with a couple of trophies for the mantle — a pair of National Magazine Awards — and an ever-surer sense of purpose. Its range of subjects and writing strategies are just what you'd hope for from a mag whose motto is "eclectic curiosity." *Maisonneuve* is a work in progress, as all living things should be, and the work is generally good. Too good to go unnoticed by Canadians (and others) interested in sharp, textured articles about the way we live now. — *Robert Everett-Green*

David Byrne. *Grace* Backwards, his eighth solo recording, shows a 52-year-old singer/songwriter/performer who continues to have plenty of fresh, interesting ideas and a willingness to throw some artistic curve balls. Name another popster who's singing Verdi arias in Latin, or collaborating with Rufus Wainwright on interpretations of Bizet tunes. — *James Adams*

The return of the ugly romantic leading man. One of the deep, dark reasons that movie critics across the continent fell for *Sideways* is that they finally found a movie character they could relate to. Paul Giamatti's lovable loser wasn't just an alcoholic wastrel (just like them!), he was sorely lacking in the looks department, too (just like them!).

After the fascist oppression of Brad Pitt's chiselled features and Orlando Bloom's fatal cheekbones in *Troy*, Giamatti's sunken self-pity finally let us into a romance we could believe. Sure, he lends the comely Virginia Madsen. But she's 41 years old, which is the female version of an unlikely romantic lead. — *Simon Houpt*