

SEEN & NOTED THIS WEEK

THE PIANIST (VIDEO) ONE SPUD
THE RESTAURANT (SERIES) TWO SPUDS
THE KOBE BRYANT SHOW (SERIES) ONE SPUD

SPUD RATING LEGEND

TWO XL SPUDS — Absolute Must See
TWO SPUDS — Worth Checking Out
ONE SPUD — Take It Or Leave It
NO SPUD 4U — Just Plain Sucks



VOLUME 204

SO THIS IS WHAT IT MUST HAVE BEEN LIKE BACK IN THE DAY BEFORE TV AND THE INTERNET

Saturday night in The Big Valley. I've just flipped through the dial half a dozen times. I've glanced two or three seconds of 2 bad Canadian movies, 3 low budget decorating shows, 2 rejection oriented reality shows, 1 bloody boxing match, old guys playing golf, crazy Aussies playing football, the weather guy who's trying to make us 'weather savvy', the smartass CITY TV people who assure us that nobody's been killed downtown, but not to worry the night is still young, an old Roman Polanski movie, and five things that were in a language I didn't understand. 6 newscasts and 4 rock videos. All in all I've got 74 channels and not a single goddam thing to watch. This is what it much have been like back in the day. Prime Time Saturday night in the middle of the summer in the centre of the universe in the Centrex of the big void that will eventually cause my brain to implode. Amen.

THE PIANIST (ONE SPUD)

The Wife and I held off renting this film for several weeks. I figured we'd have to in the right sort of mood. With all the hoopla surrounding Adrian Brody's Oscar winning performance, I kind of knew what it was all about. But there's really no way to make a movie about Jews in World War II without it being extremely depressing.

The Pianist is the true story of Warsaw pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman, (Adrian Brody) who was very well known and played for the national radio station and with the symphony and all that. The movie is basically a linear character study of Szpilman and what happened to him from 1938 to the end of WWII, and none of it is much fun. But Polanski isn't out to recreate the Holocaust, he's just out to tell one man's story and he does it well. This is a very quiet film, all things considered and at the end of it, I was strangely unmoved. I have a theory about why that was and I think it's because Szpilman was a very passive character. He talked and thought about getting involved in the resistance, but he never did. He just kind of bumbled along staring at

all the weird shit going on around him, looking very much like he'd rather be somewhere else, and who wouldn't. And though you could argue that portraying this ultra-passive individual might require a good deal of acting skill to pull off, at the end of the day there really wasn't much of a character to get behind and care about here, unlike say, Roberto Benigni's amazing portrayal of an Italian Jew in similar circumstances in Life Is Beautiful.

There's nothing really new going on here. It's WWII from a Polish perspective and it's really hard to say ho-hum without sounding anti-Semitic or something, which I am not, so don't send me any emails. This was a very well put together film about a subject that's been done a lot so there were no real surprises.

My big issue here isn't with The Pianist, It's with the fact that Adrian Brody won the best actor Oscar over Daniel Day Lewis in Gangs of New York, Michael Caine in The Quiet American and Nicholas Cage in Adaptation, all three of whose performances outstripped Brody's in every category by which you can judge these things. Something's going on here and it doesn't seem very kosher to me.

Anyway, The Pianist is a good movie. It's a big one too. But I can just barely recommend it, maybe just as a challenge to find something in Adrian Brody's performance that made it noticeably superior to Nick's, Mike's or Daniel's.

THE RESTAURANT (2 SPUDS)

(FOX TV)

Because of the sorry-ass state of television these days almost everything seems to be being marketed as a 'reality' show even when they actually don't fit that definition, so I almost let this one pass. In point of fact, I actually did miss the first couple of minutes of the opening episode of this documentary mini series, which is about, you guessed it, a restaurant. The restaurant in question was being created in the heart of Manhattan by celebrity chef Rocco DiSpirito. Having been lost in the world of TV fiction for all these years I didn't really know who Rocco was and because I missed the opening, where I assume everyone was told what was going on, I didn't have a clue. To me, it was some thirty something guy in a Yankees cap and a big SUV driving around New York city looking for locations, meeting with his money guy and his construction manager, hiring his staff, doing all kinds of PR and then whipping everybody's ass really hard to make sure that the restaurant, which is called Rocco's, would open on time.

The Restaurant is a six part series which follows Rocco from the conception of his new restaurant through to what I can only assume will be its ultimate success. But more importantly, it represents the only bright light this year in the incredibly inane morass of low rent reality based programming that's polluting the airways in an all out attempt to...Jeeez, I really don't know what it's attempting to do. Anyway, the bright light is that hopefully the leering masses who are constantly looking for new thrills, because they have no lives of their own, will stumble across The Restaurant and actually be able to see some slightly contrived but fairly good documentary film making, as opposed to the add water and stir drivel that surrounds it on all sides.

The Restaurant was actually created by Mark Burnett, who's now fat and happy because he created Survivor, which was one of the first of the most recent crop of

'reality' shows. Maybe this is just his way of giving something back for all the shekels that he has managed to accumulate from greed and voyeurism. Yeah, right.

Regardless of the motive of the creator, the show is very interesting. It moves a mile a minute, it's an amazing character study, of a driven young professional, and, of course, all the publicity it's generated for Rocco's is not lost on Mr. DiSpirito, who appears to be nobody's fool with a restaurant that's booked up till next Christmas.

There's a new convergence going on here between the editorial/entertainment side of TV and the commercial/promotional side. Sure, back in the day before these reality shows began to stink up the scene, somebody from 20/20 might gone out and done a 12 minute segment on somebody like Rocco DiSpirito. Today, it's a six hour series and on the one hand it's shaping up to basically be nothing more than a huge infomercial for Rocco's. On the other hand it's very definitely a technicolour PR movie for the City of New York, still trying to dig out from under the fear and loathing that ensued after the 9/11 attacks. Frankly, I wish them both all the luck in the world. I hope millions watch this show and support the advertisers, so that it can come back next season and bring a few intelligent cousins with it.

THE KOBE BRYANT SHOW (ONE SPUD)

I've been having a lot of conversations with people this week about the media. The event that's triggering all this palaver is a new media invention, The Kobe Bryant Show. This show is broadcast at regular intervals 24 hours a day on CNN, which to me is a network that's really in need of a juicy political scandal or terrorist attack.

For anyone who fell asleep in the sun a few weeks ago and just woke up, Kobe, arguably the best all-round basketball player in the NBA next to his LA Lakers teammate Shaquille O'Neal, was having some knee surgery done in Colorado. Kobe took advantage of the opportunity to grab some nookie with one of the staff at the clinic where he was staying. This girl is now accusing him of rape. Kobe is pleading that he had consensual sex with the girl and that at worst he is only guilty of being an idiot. Kobe's wife, who is drop dead gorgeous, appears to be behind him all the way. (Like Hillary). If found guilty, Kobe would end up riding the same train as Mike Tyson, even though Kobe is pretty much the polar opposite of that woman hating slimeball spoiled brat squeaky voiced ear biting badass.

The fact that this has become a huge national story is very sad and indicative of the downside of having a 24-hour a day news network. It's a hungry beast that needs to constantly be fed juicy tidbits of people's lives. And this has nothing at all to do with who is guilty or who is not. If this particular event, the Kobe Bryant Show, had happened even 10 years ago, it would have been settled quickly and quietly by the Lakers out of court. The girl would have been given 3 million bucks and told to go away. But the girl can now get famous. She can do walk ons on Letterman. She can be on celebrity reality shows. She can pose for Playboy and/or Penthouse. She can have her own rape counseling talk show. She can bare her soul for Barbara Walters She can become, in her own way, almost as famous as Kobe Bryant. Oi.

As with all new shows, I have a fearless forecast. The Kobe Bryant Show will take us through the dog days of August, right up until it's time to deal with The 09/11 Show, Part 3. The Lakers will offer Kobe's contract to the Denver Nuggets. (But they will

ultimately decline). However, this gesture this will sway the Colorado (white folks) jury heavily in Kobe's favour. The girl will have been assaulted, but by Kobe's lawyers at trial. But she won't break, because her future career is on the line. It will be a nailbiter all the way. CNN reporters will be embedded at the Colorado Courthouse and anywhere else there is news to report, no matter how trivial. CNN will unveil special advertising rates for corporate sponsors who want to be part of the going's on. And everybody and anybody even remotely related to this trial will get their 15 minutes of stardom. That's all a given.

But the simple fact remains that until Kobe Bryant has achieved the same level of greatness as Michael Jordan i.e. 6 NBA championship rings, he is simply not ready to be taken down by the media (in the name of the public). Kobe will be found innocent. The girl's career opportunities will be reduced to nil. She will slink back to Colorado, and end up waiting tables in some truck stop outside Boulder. Eventually Leann Rimes will write a country song about her. And life will go on.

Again, this has nothing to do with whether Kobe and this girl had consensual sex or something criminal. But you can easily see where the media is at on this issue. They're busting their ass to dig up dirt on the girl, while pointing out that Kobe has only ever been the most gentlemanly of gentlemen for his entire life. Which is actually true, because you don't attract the kind of endorsement contracts that he does without your past standing up to scrutiny. Why do you think guys like Allen Iverson or Dennis Rodman don't have big endorsement contracts with mainstream corporate America outside of the obvious hoops related ones? The answer is: because they're just not Kobe Bryant, (or Vince Carter or Grant Hill or Michael Jordan or Larry Bird)

KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED:

- *Big Screen -- Seabiscuit the movie, which opens this week opens this week. The Wife and I are headed off to Burlington to take Grandpa Pete to see it. I'll review it next week. New 2 Spud Video—Daredevil, Heaven, The Quiet American*
- *The Restaurant (Sunday Nights @10:00, NBC, Global)*
- *For the Golf Potato—Battle On The Bridges prime time match play tournament Tiger/Els VS Mickelson/Garcia. Monday @ 8:00 On ABC)*
- *Keen Eddie, which is quickly becoming the big TV hit of the summer. (@ Midnight on CH11, Monday (Re-Run), Tuesday and Wednesday (New and New)).*
- *MI-5 A new British Intelligence Agency series starring a bunch of people I don't know. But the first episode was pretty good. The Brits are very good at this stuff. (Tuesday Night @ 10:00 on A&E)*
- *The Education of Gore Vidal. A two hour PBS special on American Author and literary big shot, Gore Vidal. (Wednesday @ 10 PM)*

That's it for this week. Have a good one.