



Film

RIVERTOWN WINDS
DOWN WITH BEIRUT
AND VINCENT

The Best Is Yet to Come

BY DAVID BRAUER

AFTER COMPLETING ONE OF ITS MOST CRITICALLY and financially solid runs, the 6th Annual Rivertown Film Festival comes to a close this week.

Dominic and Eugene, the highly acclaimed Tom Hulce-Ray Liotta-Mike Farrell film, will close the official festival Saturday night, with Liotta and director Robert Young present. After that, a three-day "Best of the Fest" program will hold forth Sunday through Tuesday.

At press time, films scheduled for the "best of" program (which also includes holdovers and late arrivals) include *Made in Argentina*, *The Highest Court*, *Matter of Life and Death*, *The Old Well*, *Muller's Bureau*, *Heat and Sunlight*, *Coeurs Flambes*, *X*, *Tomorrow: There Was a War*, *Non-Professionals*, *Vampires in Havana*, *Kitchen Tolo*, *Jonahs*, and *Late Summer Blues*. Call the U Film Society at 627-4430 for the exact times and places.

Before that final curtain drops, though, there are two outstanding films on the last week's schedule.

Beirut: The Last Home Movie (Wednesday, 7:30 p.m., Willey Hall 125) is an almost perverse look at Lebanese Christian aristocrats who choose to stay in their battered Beirut mansion although it's a mere 1,200 yards from the main battle lines.

American director Jennifer Fox followed Gaby Bustros, a friend and co-worker, as she returned to a family and place she had left behind. The surreality of a mansion and aristocracy amid the carnage is not lost on Bustros. She's been in America long enough to ponder the war from a safe distance and, always the black sheep, she's felt a certain frustration with her family's noble tenacity. Now, returning to them in the middle of a war, she finds the perversity overwhelming.

Bustros returned after hearing a news report about a mortar landing in the mansion's backyard. As she arrives home (after negotiating a series of military checkpoints), she discovers that the mansion is both a prison and a refuge: Bombs have shattered most of the exterior windows, but the few upper-class Lebanese remaining inside have become an even more tightly knit society.



A SCENE FROM THE POWERFUL
VINCENT

Hiding from the war, the Bustros family has turned inward, contemplating the most intimate details of family relations. Imagine being trapped in the family home with your parents and siblings — with bombs going off now and then — and you have some idea of the neurotic pressure-cooker inside. Because of this, the film is sometimes wearing these people are necessarily self-indulgent, but at times their dialogues run on enough to remind you of conventional home movies.

Yet despite the choking family ties, there's also a bond formed by their stubbornness. In the film's most Fellini-esque moment, the only son decides to get married, and the family unhesitatingly plans to throw a grand wedding. The seeming folly becomes a triumph of the human spirit, and of iron-strong familial ties. It is the flip side of the bloody stubbornness that keeps Beirut burning.

Fox's camera only fleetingly catches life outside the mansion, but those glimpses too are revealing — the rich kids sliding out for an auto race as missiles slam into former luxury hotels. To her credit, Fox keeps the fighting in the picture, but only as a backdrop to this truly bizarre, intriguingly original look at life during wartime.

One of the fest's true must-sees is *Vincent* (Friday, 7 p.m., and Saturday, 5:30 p.m., Bell Auditorium), a humanizing documentary on painter Vincent van Gogh's life from Dutch-Australian director Paul Cox.

Using letters van Gogh wrote to his brother and patron, Theo, Cox creates a more complex portrait than the conventional crazy, on-earred, palate/knife bio.

Actor John Hurt reads the letters, which trace van Gogh's beginnings as a minister hopeful (!) to his evolution as a painter. In the early letters, it becomes clear that van Gogh is passionately tapped in to the idea of higher truth. The rest of the film is a definitive portrait of the joys and depressions of an endless search for meaning.

More and more, it becomes clear that the tragedy of van Gogh's life was his relentless. Any artist can relate to the epiphany experienced by van Gogh when he realizes that he can paint. "I no longer stand before nature," he writes simply, as Cox's camera caresses the brush strokes of an

Perhaps because he is asking for more, van Gogh does not hesitate to praise himself in his letters, but the price of self-realization is that he increasingly knows his higher quest has consumed his human existence.

The letters cover van Gogh's periods of sanity more in terms of this artistic dilemma than in any specific explanation of what he hacked off his ear (it's only referred to obliquely, once).

Backed by the artist's surprisingly stark words (we can only hope he wrote as well as translated), Cox's languorous pictorial style is intoxicating. From van Gogh's first work to the blue period, it's art history made (here, film seems to be the second-best way to see a painting). The director butters these shots with views of the actual location van Gogh painted.

The only flaw in the director's work is he tries to recreate historical scenes from van Gogh's time with Australian actors. Her film is too literal and, as a result, less vivid; viewers are jarred, brought from metaphysical into the stagey. The scenes attract from, but aren't enough to ruin them. Like the works on which it is based, *Vincent* is still vivid.

TWIN CITIES
Reader