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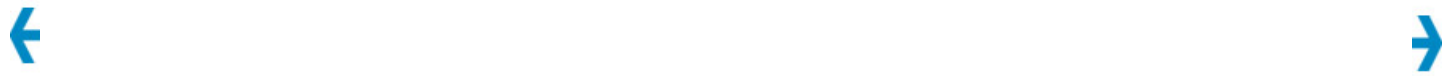
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Is Ryan Gosling the Next Brando?

Posted August 14, 2007 | 04:11 PM (EST)

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When does an artist begin to matter? When do they become someone you know you'll be following for years to come, someone you're going to watch in any movie (good or bad) to see what they're doing and what they're becoming?

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For Ryan Gosling, it happened with his Oscar-nominated turn in "Half Nelson," an indie film in which he played a crack-addicted schoolteacher and did it with such style, such grace and with so much of the performance embedded in his eyes that even a fool (ie Oscar voters) could see this was the start of

something wonderful.

Of course, Gosling also impressed playing a Jewish neo-Nazi in "The Believer," a kill-for-thrills high school student in the B movie "Murder By Numbers" and he unintentionally became a pin-up with the word-of-mouth romantic hit "The Notebook." (I'd love to think hordes of teenaged girls checked out "Half Nelson" so they could swoon over their dreamboat, only to find him slumped over in a bathroom stall, far more interested in his next high than in some giggly fan.)

But anyone can enjoy a string of good roles. Gosling may be most impressive for "Fracture" (\$28.98; New Line). It's a forgettable mystery, with Gosling as an ambitious attorney and Anthony Hopkins as a wily man who murdered his wife in a manner so clever he may just get away with it. The movie is nothing, really, but Gosling invests his role with immediacy and watching him spar with Hopkins is a pleasure. He's great when he has a great role. But he's also watchable in a bad one and that may be the surest sign of an enduring talent.

If Gosling has any competition for the tag of "the next Brando," it is Joseph Gordon-Levitt. Gordon-Levitt seems to have the most under-appreciated skill for forging a serious career: the ability to pick good scripts. (Gosling's average is decidedly lower.) JGL (just to save space, folks) made his name on the TV sitcom "Third Rock From the Sun" but has been absolutely stunning in indie films like "Mysterious Skin," "Brick" (which sets Dashiell Hammett in high school) and now "The Lookout" (\$29.99; Miramax).

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This film isn't as significant as those others (the story of a bank job gone awry is too familiar) but JGL is wonderful again, this time as a young man who is a bit slow mentally after a tragic car accident upends his life. JGL also has a good sense of humor: check out this <http://www.hitrecord.org/picturesofassholes.php> video about paparazzi he made.

Director Sam Fuller's talents blossomed fully in 1953's "Pickup On South Street." But you can see him stretching his muscles on "The First Films Of Samuel Fuller" (\$44.95; Eclipse - the just-the-facts division of Criterion that promises great prints at low prices but no extras). His first two films ("I Shot Jesse James" in 1949 and "The Baron Of Arizona" in 1950) have some flair. But it's probably the Korean War movie "The Steel Helmet" (1951) that made sharp-eyed cineastes sit up and take notice.

And once an artist has hooked you, you're hooked. David Lynch drew us in with "Eraserhead" and established his cult credentials for good with the brilliant "Blue Velvet." How else to explain fans sitting through the three hour "Inland Empire" (\$29.99; Rhino) AND another three and a half hours of extras on a bonus disc?

Also out this week: a knee-weakening anthology for fans of KISS called "Kissology: The Ultimate Kiss Collection Vol. 2" (\$34.98; VHI Classics), which has the entire 1979 movie "Kiss In Attack Of The Phantoms," numerous concerts from the 80s and 90s, music videos, TV interviews and more; David Janssen shows that pretty boy punk from "Prison Break" how it's really done in "The Fugitive Season One Volume One" (\$38.99; Paramount); "Aqua Teen Hunger Force Movie" (\$29.98; Warner Bros.) has a tough time stretching out its plots from 8 minutes to 88 minutes (it must be those trans fats); yet another lavish special edition of Jim Henson's pretty darn cool "The Dark Crystal" (\$24.96; Sony); and "U-Carmen" (\$26.98; Koch Lorber) may just have given us an artist to watch for in the future.

So who have you spotted as the next rising talent - someone that hasn't been talked about too much yet? And who do you think will prove more enduring: Ryan Gosling or Joseph Gordon-Levitt?

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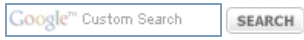
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