**Seven Days...**

Friday, April 6th
O.C. Supertones at The Palladium, Worcester
Pamela Means at Boston University, Boston
Superhoney at Johnny D’s, Somerville
M.O.P. and Smut Peddlers at Middle East Club, Cambridge

Saturday, April 7th
Bane, Dark Star Orchestra, Hod Rod Circuit, Malden, Over My Dead Body, River City High, and Thursday at The Palladium, Worcester
Michelle Malone and Pamela Means at the Lizard Lounge, Cambridge

Sunday, April 8th
Tim Easton at T.T. The Bear’s, Cambridge
Bastard Sons Of Johnny Cash at House of Blues, Cambridge
The Step Kings at Bill’s Bar, Boston

Monday, April 9th
D:Fuse and Paul Oakenfold at Avalon, Boston
Frank Black and The Catholics at Paradise Rock Club, Boston

Tuesday, April 10th
Wax Poetic at Clark University, Worcester
Pete Yorn and Semisonic at Paradise Rock Club, Boston
Big Dumb Face and El Greco at Axis, Boston

Wednesday, April 11th
Ferron at Passim’s, Cambridge
Sex Mob at Lilli’s, Somerville

Thursday, April 12th
98 Degrees, Baha Men, Debelah Morgan, and Dream at The Centrum, Worcester
98 Degrees, Baha Men, Debelah Morgan, and Dream at The Centrum, Worcester

**Cocaine cinema ‘Blow’ intriguing, energetic bio**

**BY TIM O’CONNOR**

**CRUSADER FEATURES EDITOR**

Drugs and the drug trade have always proved reliable fodder for screenwriters and directors, particularly the past year with, up-and-coming filmmakers Darren Aronofsky and Steven Soderbergh tackling the subject matter with gusto in “Requiem for a Dream” and “Traffic,” respectively. “Requiem” was a critical favorite, and “Traffic” is still the talk of the town thanks to its four Oscar wins — a bedrock assurance that drugs will continue to have a healthy exposure in film for some time to come, and already one more film is fulfilling that prophecy.

Hot on the heels of the critical, financial, and award-circuit success of “Traffic” comes director Timotheus David Deems’ “Blow,” a more narrow, straight-shot look at life in the drug trade without the social-problem angle of Soderbergh’s picture.

Where “Traffic” presented a gritty, no-holds-barred examination of the drug trade with obvious, and perhaps unavoidable, commentary on all involved, “Blow” presents a tightly-focused biographical account of one of the drug trade’s most notorious celebrities, American cocaine kingpin George Jung (played by Johnny Depp). During the 1970s, Jung became the American front for Pablo Escobar’s Medellin Cartel in Colombia and the chief architect of the lucrative cocaine craze in the U.S. during the disco era — though Deems’ film suggests the demand was already there, Jung just provided the supply. Deems frames Jung’s story around the archetypal rise-and-fall crime saga, the backbone of films such as Howard Hawks’ “Scarface” and Martin Scorsese’s “Casino,” and while his approach to the subject matter isn’t wholeheartedly original (Deems’ technique and storytelling style borrows rather heavily from Scorsese himself), it’s focused, solid, and through the first two-thirds of the movie, surprisingly energetic.

“Blow” avoids excessive moralizing on both the greater issues of the drug trade and Jung’s motivations — the movie’s central concern is first and foremost, to tell Jung’s story, not to pass judgement on it. Though the last third comes dangerously close to the quagmire of morbid sentimentality, Deems manages to craft Jung’s experiences in a satisfyingly intriguing fashion.

“Blow” begins with Jung’s middle-class beginnings in Massachusetts, as the young son of Fred Jung (Ray Liotta), an honest man who loves his family and believes in the value of a hard day’s work, yet can’t seem to earn enough money to make ends meet, much to the chagrin of George’s mother (Rachel Griffiths), frequently leaving her husband and son out of frustration. Young George vows never to share dad’s fate of eeking out a meager living, and moves to California with his friend Tuna (Ethan Suplee) when he comes of age. Jung and Tuna soon find a profitable business in peddling marijuana to the carefree beach-culture, with the help of hairdresser Derek Foreal (Paul Reubens), who deals the stuff on the side. When a visiting friend alerts them to the untapped markets of east-coast college students, Jung goes from selling joints on the beach to smoothing pounds of marijuana back east with his steadfast girlfriend Barbara (Sadie Frost), using the weed selling like hotcakes and the money rolling in, Jung sets his sights higher, establishing connections with Mexican suppliers and turning his fledging business into a mini marijuana empire, until he lands in jail, after being caught in Chicago.

Behind bars, Jung meets the man that will forge his future fortune and failure, Diego Delgado (Jordi Molla), a Columbian with apparent ties to Pablo Escobar (Cliff Curtis), head of the Medellin cocaine cartel. Diego sets up a meeting between Escobar and Jung once out of prison, and soon after Jung takes an active part in smuggling the dangerous drug into the country. A combination of Jung’s drug-dealing prowess and an American culture all-too-likely for the next big thing in narcotics makes Jung millions almost overnight. His success in America lands up a spot within the inner circle of Columbia’s drug kingpins, where he meets his future wife Mirtha (Penelope Cruz).

Deems directs the first two-thirds of “Blow” with an eye toward capturing the more romantic allure of drugs and drug use that defined a significant portion of 60s and 70s culture. He plays off this allure in depicting Jung’s early forays into drug dealing — we see the young entrepreneur awash with giddy exuberance over the ease of raking in piles of cash by supplying a hard-to-come-by product with the guile of the drug business and the thrill of success reach a fever pitch in the second part of the movie where Deems forcefully shows Jung, now a veritable U.S. tycoon in the cocaine trade, almost totally consumed by the status, celebrity, and wealth of being a high roller in the drug market. Deems keeps the dramatic edge nice and sharp throughout Jung’s success story — it’s kinetic, well-paced, and manages to craft a fuller experience for the audience. Yet, the energy of the first two acts nearly stalls in the final 45 minutes — more a fault of David McKenna and Nick Cassavetes’ screenplay, which switches gears from exploring Jung’s complex, and far more fascinating, association with the drug trade, to drumming up audience sympathy for the beleaguered cocaine dealer after the lifestyle that made him a success comes back to haunt him in the form of betrayals, federal raids, marital problems, and bankruptcy. Of course, Jung’s fall from the top is part of the story, yet the film goes the sentimental route in depicting it — his regrets over alienation with his father and separation from his daughter, brought on by his criminal activities, distract from the movie’s intriguing glimpse into Jung’s own character and motivations, along with slowing down the dramatic pace that worked so well in the first half.

Still, Deems manages to keep “Blow” engaging until the credits roll, a success achieved in no small part to some of the most surprisingly stellar performances so far this year. Johnny Depp, always a welcome addition to any cast thanks to his knack for fully embodying more unorthodox roles, displays his talent in fine form as a George Jung, believable in his motivations and human in his failings. Penelope Cruz delivers a passionate, if rather one-dimension- al, turn as Mirtha, but the real surprise in “Blow” is Ray Liotta as Jung’s father Fred — his portrayal of a good man with good values, spurned by both wife and son, wonderfully evokes a kind of inner tragedy that, in the end, is quite touching. Deems’ biopic doesn’t break much new ground, but “Blow’s” focused dedication to the story it’s trying to tell gives it an intensity and directness sometimes missing from films like these. Despite some overall sentimentality,