

New releases mostly on the gloomy side

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By Boo Allen/Film Critic

Prepare this week for some brooding intensity:

Rare appearances by two distinct artists mark *There Will Be Blood*, the fifth movie from writer/director Paul Thomas Anderson, his first since 2002. And, in an Oscar-winning performance, Daniel Day-Lewis returns to the screen for the first time since 2005.

Lewis plays Daniel Plainview, a turn-of-the-20th-century oilman, mean, single-focused, and devoid of any limiting attributes such as honor, truth, or kindness.

Anderson delivers an authentic portrait of this era, as shown in the DVD supplement *The Story of Petroleum*. Anderson dips into Upton Sinclair's obscure novel *Oil!* for his source, staying with Plainview and the chronicling of his fortunes.

This love of money sounds cautionary warnings, as the film's various characters fall under the spell promised by the riches of an oil strike. Despite the film's almost epic sweep, Anderson stays close to Daniel Plainview, knowing that the conflict buried in this intense man signals the greatest drama.

The singular subplot has Paul Dano playing a smugly religious type involved in a constant, ill-fated feud with Plainview, a battle that further defines Plainview and his quest for supremacy. Oscar-winning cinematographer Robert Elswit works with Anderson to render his customary long takes, but the focus stays mostly on the era's drabness. In one of the year's most distinguished soundtracks, Jonny Greenwood mixes a variety of sounds to create fitting accompaniments.

The double-disc Collector's Edition offers the lengthy film on one disc and ample supplements on the second. The prize oddity is the silent, black-and-white *The Story of Petroleum*, a 1923 joint production by the Bureau of Mines and Sinclair Oil. The 26-minute segment proves surprisingly beguiling, topical and informative, despite its age.

The other six or so additions of nearly an hour consist of various clips from the movie being fleshed out. In the 15-minute "making of" featurette "Pies, Research, Etc.," this enrichment comes through contrasting a series of black-and-white photos of the era with shots from the film. Plus, some bloopers, a trailer and other comparisons, such as the *Haircut*, the *Hymnal*, etc.

Fog City Mavericks (*)** This engaging documentary posits an interesting premise — that is, that the San Francisco Bay area has for some time been a filmmaking community to rival Hollywood.

When all the names are assembled, the theory holds substantial weight: Francis Coppola and his American Zoetrope studio, George Lucas and his Skywalker Ranch, John Lasseter and his Pixar Animation Studios, as well as directors Philip Kaufman, Chris Columbus and Sofia Coppola and producer Saul Zaentz, all of whom sit for lengthy interviews with writer/director Gary Leva.

Leva also provides historical background to the area's pioneer spirit, starting with Edward Muybridge's early camera experiments along with more recent examples, such as the younger Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*. It's a universally enjoyable documentary, and not only for fanatical moviegoers.

Not rated, 120 minutes. The DVD offers only a sampling of on-air promos.

Reservation Road (1/2)** This deterministic tale is about pressure, the pressure of guilt, of recrimination, and of the destructive power of anger. But the pressure to render these emotions into a compelling motion picture, however, proves taxing.

The most remarkable element of this film from director Terry George (*Hotel Rwanda*) is seeing Mark Ruffalo and Joaquin Phoenix playing two intense men engaging in a cat-and-mouse standoff. But in the perfunctory roles as their wives, Jennifer Connelly and Mira Sorvino, two recent Academy Award-winning actresses, seem afterthoughts, thrown in for little more than decorations.

Since it happens almost immediately, it's not much of a spoiler to state that the child of Ethan Learner (Phoenix) dies from a hit-and-run accident caused by Dwight Arno (Ruffalo). The real grief mounts, as everyone registers the requisite deep states of emotion. Then, to compound the manufactured irony, when Learner feels like the police aren't doing their job, he hires Arno to be his lawyer. From there, the strident build-up of an inevitable climax leading to some sort of closure becomes grating.

Director George, who breathed such menace into his *Hotel Rwanda*, never succeeds in conjuring much of anything but a feeling of dread and angst.



Courtesy photo
A turn-of-the-20th-century oilman (Daniel Day-Lewis, right) feuds with a religious man (Paul Dano) in 'There Will Be Blood'.