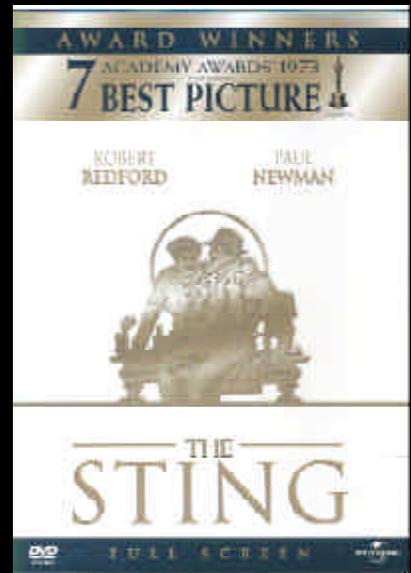
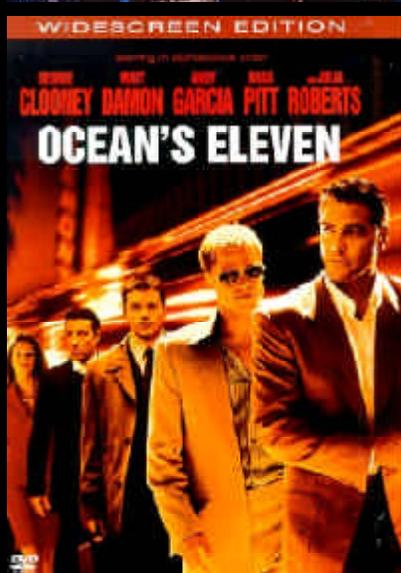
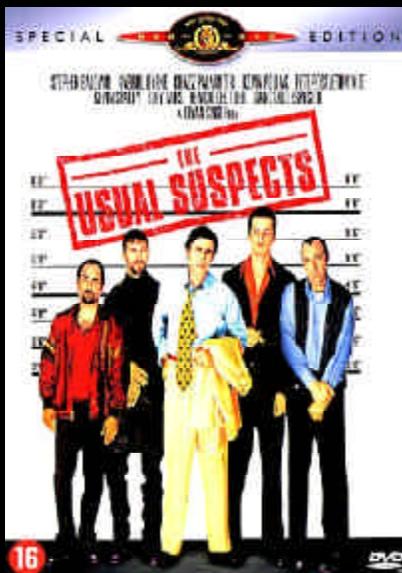
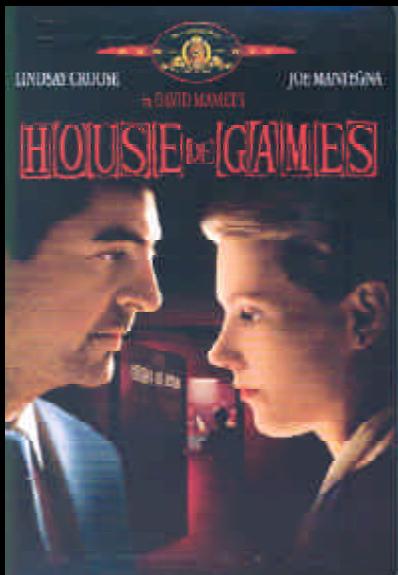


THE AMERICAN CENTER FILM PROGRAM

September- October, 2004

CONFIDENCE MEN (AND WOMEN): Can You Catch Their Grift?





Usual Suspects (1995)

Color/Running time: 106 mins

Sept. 14, 15, 16, 17 1:00 p.m.
Sept. 18 9:00 a.m.

Director Bryan Singer's labyrinthine crime drama centers on five career criminals (played by Gabriel Byrne, Kevin Spacey, Benicio Del Toro, Kevin Pollak, and Stephen Baldwin) who meet after being rounded up for a standard police line-up. Upon their release, the men band together to pull off an intricate heist involving \$3 million worth of emeralds. Their success brings them to the attention of the enigmatic Keyser Soze, an unseen, nefarious, and mythic

underworld crime figure who coerces them into pulling off an important and highly dangerous job. The scenes that follow make *The Usual Suspects* one of the most fascinating crime thrillers in cinema history.

Working from the Oscar-winning screenplay by Christopher McQuarrie, director Singer adroitly tells the complex story through flashbacks, cross-cutting, and voice-over narration. Such nimble handling of the intricacies of the nonlinear narrative adds to the suspense, leaving viewers on the edge of their seats until the clever, satisfying finale. Filled with excellent performances from veteran actors (Kevin Spacey won his first Academy Award for his breakthrough role as Verbal Kint), *The Usual Suspects* placed director Singer squarely on the cinematic map.

Starring: Louis Lombardi, Gabriel Byrne, Kevin Spacey, Benicio Cel Toro, Kevin Pollak, Stephen Baldwin, Pete Postlethwaite

Director: Bryan Singer



House of Games (1987)

Color/Running time: 101 mins

(The main feature film will be preceded by "Short Shorts," a selection of international short films)

Sept. 21, 22, 23, 24 12:00 noon
Sept. 25 9:00 a.m.

Pulitzer Prize winner David Mamet wrote and directed this modern film noir masterpiece. Dr. Margaret Ford (Lindsay Crouse) is a successful psychiatrist who lives her life through her troubled patients, until she falls for a man who is simply trouble. Mike (Joe Mantegna), a dangerous and seductive confidence man, pulls Margaret into an elaborate con game where she can't be sure where one

hustle ends and another begins. Drawn to Mike and the dark side of life, Margaret thinks she can have a taste of the underworld without being swallowed herself. But as layer after layer of deceit is peeled away, she finds herself caught in a scam spinning wildly out of control... trapped in a hall of mirrors deep inside a House of Games.

Mamet's story is a fascinating study of two people protecting and extending their respective cosmologies the way rival predators fight for the same piece of turf. The psychological challenge is compelling; so is the stylized dialogue, with its pattern of pauses and hiccups and humming meter. Mostly shooting at night, Mamet also gave Seattle a different look from previous filmmakers, turning its familiar puddles into concentrations of liquid neon and poisonous noir.

Starring: Lindsay Crouse, Joe Mantegna

Director: David Mamet



Ocean's Eleven (1960)

Color/Running Time: 127 mins

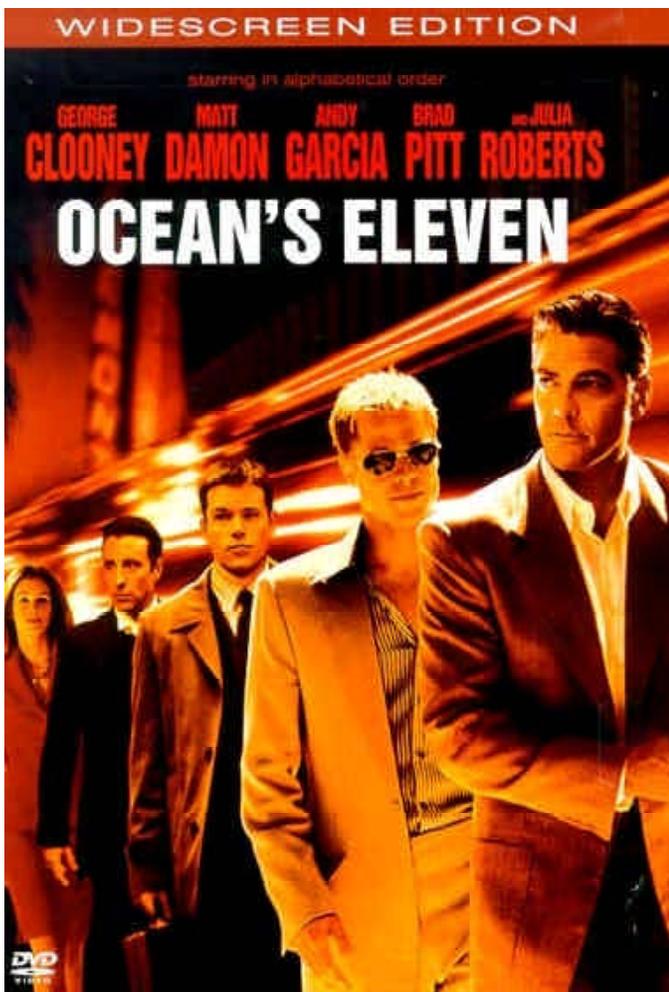
Sept. 28, 29, 30, Oct. 1 1:00 p.m.
Oct. 2 9:00 a.m.

Frank Sinatra stars as Danny Ocean in this crime comedy about a former paratrooper, who talks ten other ex-members of the 82nd Airborne into a plan to take five of the biggest casinos in Las Vegas for a few million dollars on New Year's Eve. Among the group are Sam Harmon (Dean Martin), Jimmy Foster (Peter Lawford), Josh Howard (Sammy Davis Jr.), and Mushy O'Connors (Joey Bishop). Danny, whose marriage to Bea (Angie Dickinson) is on thin ice, feels the

skills he acquired in the service will prove more profitable in the criminal world. Not all the prospective thieves, however, are self serving; the injured Tony Bergdorf (Richard Conte) needs the money for his son's education. But most of the men, like Josh, who won the Distinguished Service Medal and now drives a garbage truck, feel they deserved better from their country. It appears that Danny has devised a scheme to knock out power to the Las Vegas strip, electronically rig five casino vaults and raid them all at the same time. It's the perfect heist—assuming they can steer clear of Duke Santos (Cesar Romero), an ex-con (and Jimmy's prospective father-in-law) who's caught wind of their scheme. The film is packed with location-lensed glamour, sweaty suspense, swinging suspense and a stunning twist ending.

Starring: Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., Peter Lawford,
Angie Dickinson

Director: Lewis Milestone



Ocean's Eleven (2001)

Color/Running time: 117 mins

Oct. 5, 6, 7, 8

1:00 p.m.

Oct. 9

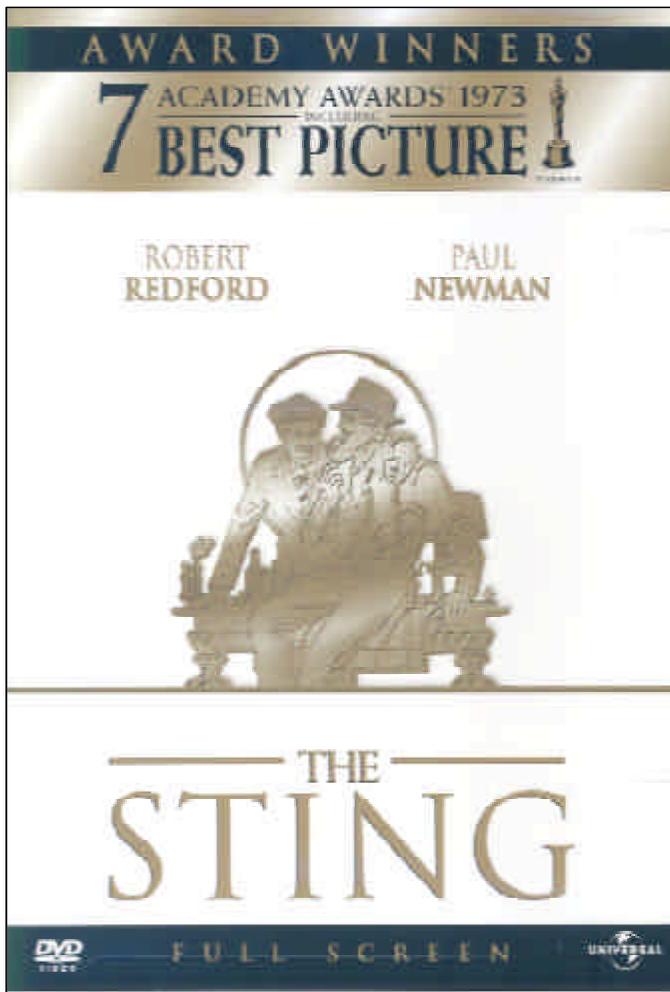
9:00 a.m.

This new version of *Ocean's Eleven* improves on the 1960 original with supernova casting, a slickly updated plot, and director Steven Soderbergh's graceful touch behind the camera. Soderbergh reportedly relished the opportunity "to make a movie that has no desire except to give pleasure from beginning to end," and he succeeds on those terms, blessed by the casting of George Clooney as Danny Ocean, the title role originated by Frank Sinatra.

Fresh out of jail, Ocean masterminds a plot to steal \$163 million from the seemingly impervious vault of Las Vegas's Bellagio casino, not just for the money but to win his ex-wife (Julia Roberts) back from the casino's ruthless owner (Andy Garcia). Soderbergh doesn't scrimp on the caper's comically intricate strategy, but he finds greater joy in assembling a stellar team (including Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, Don Cheadle, and Carl Reiner) and indulging their strengths as actors. The result is a film that's as smooth as a silk suit and just as stylish.

Starring: George Clooney, Matt Dillon, Andy Garcia, Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts, Don Cheadle, Carl Reiner

Director: Steven Soderbergh



The Sting (1973)

Color/Running Time: 129 mins

Oct. 13, 14, 15

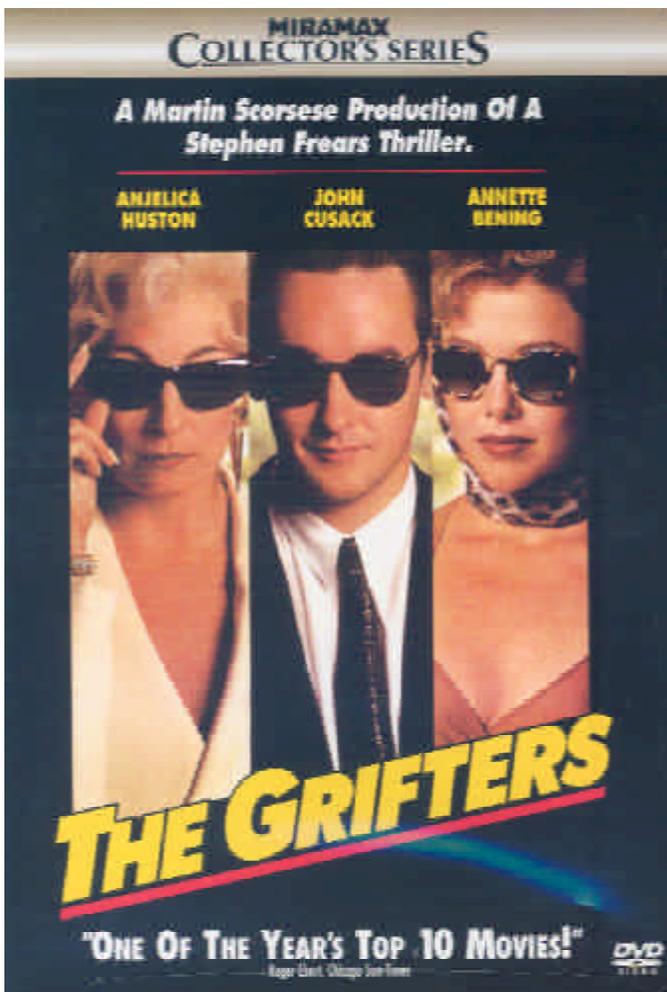
1:00 p.m.

Winner of seven Academy Awards including Best Picture, Director, and Screenplay, this box-office hit from 1973 has become one of America's favorite and most critically-acclaimed films. Set in 1936, Newman and Redford star as two con men out to avenge the death of a mutual friend. They seek revenge on crime lord, Robert Shaw, with a "sting" that is one of the greatest double-crosses in movie history, complete with an amazing surprise finish. Using a bogus bookie joint as a front for their

con of all cons, the two feel the heat from the Chicago Mob on one side and encroaching police on the other. But in a plot that contains more twists than a treacherous mountain road, the ultimate "sting" is pulled off with consummate style and panache. One of the most entertaining movies of the early 1970s, *The Sting* is a welcome throwback to Hollywood's golden age of the '30s that hasn't lost any of its popular charm.

Starring: Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Robert Shaw

Director: George Roy Hill



The Grifters (1985)

Color/Running time: 110 mins

Oct. 19, 20, 21, 22 1:00 p.m.
Oct. 23 9:00 a.m.

The Grifters has the mastery and hallucinatory, all-involving feel of an instant classic. The tale is spun of three “grifters,” (confidence men) forever on the lookout for an easy hustle. Lily (Anjelica Huston) is an ultra-experienced pro who specializes in racetrack odds altering. Her son, Roy (John Cusack), is basically small-time, hustling sailors and bartenders with loaded dice and sleight-of-hand tricks. His inamorata, Myra (Annette Bening), likes corporate action, a field she is easily able to ply with her

siren’s body and wardrobe of Chanel suits. Lily had Roy when she was but a girl herself, and the two have mostly gone their separate ways. They meet up again in California, where Lily takes an immediate dislike to Myra. Her ill feeling is met and matched by Roy, who has never resolved his filial feelings for her, as well as by Myra, who, having been wholly rebuffed by Lily, resolves to take her down. The climax, involving Lily and Roy, is swift, ugly, cathartic, and ultimately elegiac all at once.

Adapted from writer Jim Thompson’s novel, Donald Westlake’s screenplay has the right combination of vivid characters, mordant wit and avaricious savagery which distinguishes the best noir. The characters speak in a faintly disconcerting 1950s argot right out of the book, adding an authentic flavor to the simmeringly suggestive stew Frears has concocted.

This is a splendid film. One of the hard movies of the last decade. A chess game in the purest sense of the word. Frears is a very original film maker and this film may be well considered his masterpiece.

Starring: John Cusack, Anjelica Houston, Annette Bening

Director: Stephen Frears



Matchstick Men (2003)

Color/Running time: 116 mins

Oct. 26, 27, 29 1:00 p.m.
Oct. 30 9:00 a.m.

Meet Roy (Nicholas Cage) and Frank (Sam Rockwell), a couple of professional matchstick men (small-time confidence men). What Roy, a veteran con artist, and Frank, his ambitious protégé, are swindling these days are “water filtration systems,” bargain-basement water filters bought by unsuspecting people who pay ten times their value in order to win bogus prizes like cars, jewelry and overseas vacations—which they never collect. These scams net the two matchstick men a few hundred

here, another thousand there, which eventually adds up to a lucrative partnership. Roy’s private life, however, is not so successful. An obsessive-compulsive agoraphobe with no personal relationships to call his own, Roy is barely hanging on to his wits, and when his idiosyncrasies begin to threaten his criminal productivity he’s forced to seek the help of a psychoanalyst just to keep him in working order. While Roy is looking for a quick fix, his therapy begets more than he bargained for: the revelation that he has a teenage daughter—a child whose existence he suspected but never dared confirm. What’s more troubling, 14-year-old Angela (Alison Lohman) wants to meet the father she never knew. At first, Angela’s appearance disrupts her neurotic father’s carefully ordered routine. Soon, however, with his own unique spin on parenthood, Roy begins to enjoy a relationship he never dreamed of having with his daughter. But while he develops paternal feelings for the 14-year-old, she’s developing a fascination with Daddy’s questionable career and that turns *Matchstick Men* into a multilayered comedy with unexpected twists and surprising revelations. For fun, suspense and brain-busting twists, nothing’s hotter than *Matchstick Men*.

Starring: Nicholas Cage, Sam Rockwell, Alison Lohman

Director: Ridley Scott