



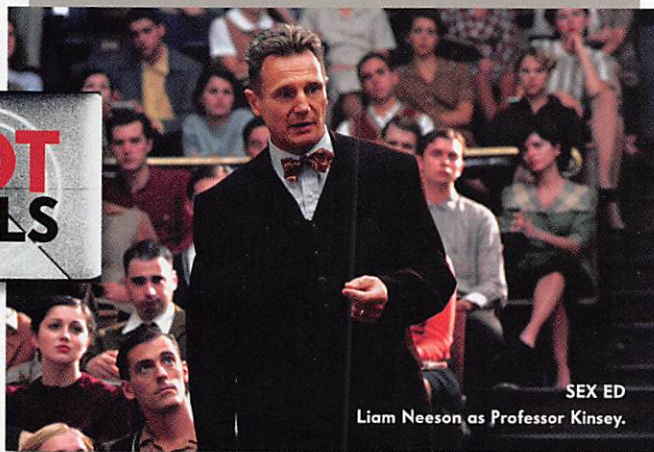
MUSIC MAN
Kerry Washington, Jamie Foxx,
and Regina King on the set of *Ray*.

Ray of Light

JAMIE FOXX SHINES AS MUSIC LEGEND RAY CHARLES

Music biopics have ranged from the award-worthy (*What's Love Got to Do with It*, *The Rose*, *Coal Miner's Daughter*) to the truly square (*The Doors*). Now we have *Ray*, starring **Jamie Foxx** as **Ray Charles**, which took director **Taylor Hackford** 15 years to bring to the screen and is clearly the work of people who understand and love music. Hackford is a veteran of two authentic music movies—the **Ritchie Valens** biopic *La Bamba* and the documentary *Chuck Berry: Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*. Foxx is a musician with plans for his own recording career. Charles, who died last June at age 73, approved the script, and “the genius of soul” sings 40 songs in the two-and-a-half-hour movie. Charles, blind since age seven, was a revolutionary who changed American music forever when he merged gospel with blues, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, and country and western—bringing sexuality to church music and a testifying joy to popular songs. He won 12 Grammys, had 76 hit singles (such classics as “I’ve Got a Woman,” “Georgia on My Mind,” and “Hit the Road Jack”), and recorded more than 75 albums. To play him, Foxx had to get Charles’s approval. “He gave me his blessing,” says Foxx, but not until he was tested by Charles on piano. To prepare for the role, Foxx wore a blindfold for weeks, and during filming had his eyes glued shut for 14 hours a day. Hackford says, “I’m happy the movie took 15 years, because we found Jamie Foxx,” whose commanding performance is already creating Oscar talk. *Ray* does not gloss over Charles’s struggle to get out of the segregated South, his well-known womanizing, or his drug use. “Nobody did it like Ray Charles,” says Hackford. “And what I’m most proud of is the fact that he participated in this; everything about this film, he touched.” (Rating: ★★★★★) —LISA ROBINSON

HOT REELS



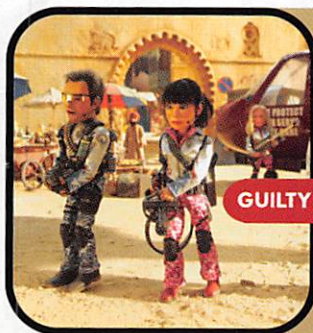
SEX ED
Liam Neeson as Professor Kinsey.

Sex Factors

BILL CONDON DOCUMENTS KINSEY'S REPORTS

Kinsey, a witty and often moving new film from writer-director **Bill Condon** (*Gods and Monsters*), reminds us that there once was an America where people didn't necessarily know what oral sex was, at least not by name. Talk about a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away! *Kinsey* is a biopic of **Alfred Kinsey**, the Indiana University entomologist who, in the 1940s, turned to cataloguing human sexual activity in all its florid variety. For the most part, this was uncharted territory: who knew, before 1948's best-selling *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, that 70 percent of American men had had premarital sex? (Alas, Kinsey's parallel finding that 50 percent of midcentury American brides shouldn't have worn white proved harder for the public to take.) But Condon's film is more than just a “great man” saga, a sex-ed *Gandhi*; at its best, *Kinsey* toys with the very nature of sex, not to mention love, its occasional and often troublesome by-product. The performances—**Liam Neeson** as our vulnerable, obsessive, socially retarded hero; **Laura Linney** as Mac, his plainspoken, freethinking wife (mother of cheerful daughters who pipe up at the dinner table about their hymens); **Peter Sarsgaard**, **Timothy Hutton**, and **Chris O'Donnell** as key members of Kinsey's wife-swapping research team—are uniformly excellent. But getting back to coitus: as Condon has Sarsgaard's character note, forsaking clinical detachment and bowing to the primal, ultimately unquantifiable power of “fucking”: “If you're not careful, it can cut you wide open [emotionally].” In the end, *Kinsey* may turn gently away from some of its stickier implications, but in an entertainment world where sex, while omnipresent, is usually treated no more realistically than is physics or socioeconomics, the movie remains nearly as radical as the man himself. (Rating: ★★★½) —BRUCE HANDY

FROM TOP: BY SAM JONES, KEN REGAN, MELINDA SUE GORDON



GUILTY PLEASURE TEAM AMERICA: WORLD POLICE

Voice-overs by: Trey Parker and Matt Stone (*South Park* creators). **Directed by:** Trey Parker for Paramount Pictures. **In theaters:** Now. **Fade in:** A Broadway actor is recruited to help an international police unit save the world from terrorists. **Stroke of genius:** It's a puppet show. That is, a \$20 million, feature-length film with an all-marionette cast. The sets and explosions are real, just miniature. **Raked over the coals:** Jerry Bruckheimer action movies, celebrity culture, Bush-Cheney foreign policy. **Mastermind:** Think **Jim Henson** as Ritalin-addled juvenile delinquent. **Industry question:** Parker and Stone have had bad luck with human actors (*Orgazmo*, *BASEketball*), but their ruthlessly clever animated series, *South Park*, which first aired in 1997, is funnier now than ever. Will wood and papier-mâché prove too big a departure? **Trend watch:** Audiences respond to irreverent humor—no matter how depraved—as long as strings are attached. —ADAM LAUKHUF