

first



If looks could kill: The actor showing his dark side

the hit man cometh

All charm and shadows, John Cusack is a Jimmy Stewart for the '90s

It's a pretty sick idea for a film," John Cusack says, over black coffee and cigarettes in his loftlike office in Venice Beach, which houses a basketball court and a boxing gym. The film in question, *Grosse Pointe Blank*, out this month, is the first that the actor has co-produced, co-written, and starred in under the auspices of his film and theater company, New Crime Productions—an appropriate name given the storyline: Cusack plays a hit man who combines business (murder) with pleasure (albeit a kind of tortured pleasure, turning up at his ten-year high school reunion). "I took my character, Martin, as an

extended metaphor for those corporate professionals who can be cutthroat all day and then go home and hug their wife and kids. I'm fascinated by those people, because obviously they're a part of us, and we're a part of them. Everybody has a shadow." Cusack is soft-spoken and courtly, very much an adult version of the teenage characters he played in sweet '80s comedies such as *Say Anything* and *The Sure Thing*—smart, sensitive, honest, sexy. Now entering his thirties and diverging somewhat from the more serious roles he took on in *City Hall* and *The Grifters*, >

CLIFF WATTS (GROOMING BY ALIKI FOR PROFILE L.A.; STYLING BY AGNES BADDIO FOR REX)

EDITED BY JENNIFER PIERCE BARR

Cusack, continued...

the actor shows signs of being the kind of leading man women adore and men respect. When he and co-star Minnie Driver exchange romantic dialogue that comes at you as fast and furious as the 9mm gunplay in *Grosse Pointe Blank*, he exudes the charm and vulnerability of a young Jimmy Stewart. (Together, they could be the '90s equivalent of Nick and Nora Charles.)

After a decade in Hollywood, Cusack—who in that time has turned down *Indecent Proposal*, said yes to Woody Allen, Rob Reiner, Tim Robbins, Alan Parker, and Stephen Frears, and founded a Chicago-based theater company—doesn't have an ounce of smarm on him. Where he goes next is entirely his choice: He has recently completed his first big-budget



action movie, *Con Air*, with Nicolas Cage and John Malkovich, and he's working on another screenplay, having completed his second, *Hail, Mary*, about life in the NFL. "You have people being violent toward one another—man's inhumanity to man, adrenaline," he says of the latter. "But I don't think we've made it stupid enough." Probably not, considering that Cusack was reading Noam Chomsky while his contemporaries watched *Speed Racer*.—HILLARY JOHNSON

rising sons

Celebrity kids make good

Nepotism is nothing new to the music world (think Dweezil and Moon Unit Zappa), but here are a few star offspring whose work might have earned them record deals even without the help of string-

music

pulling parents: Ruggedly gorgeous Jakob Dylan, son of the far less photogenic Bob, leads the folk-inspired Wallflowers;

Crispian Mills, singer/guitarist for England's neo-psychedelic outfit Kula Shaker, calls *The Parent Trap's* Hayley Mom; and Deadsy's frontman, Elijah

Blue, was produced by the odd coupling of Greg Allman and

Cher (fittingly, his band plays scary goth-rock). To ensure success, they should all fight to get Roman Coppola

as a video director. With a string of hit clips for *The Presidents of the United States of America*, *Cibo Matto*, and *Green Day* under his belt, the son of Francis Ford has already proven himself.

—JAMES PATRICK HERMAN



backstage pass: Three sisters, two cousins, Craig Lucas's gritty new play . . . and more

February is typically the bleakest month on Broadway. But between the Christmas rush and the glut of big-money shows sliding in before Tony nominations, there are a few bright spots.

■ The Roundabout Theatre Company gives some Hollywood shine to a stark Russian classic, with Amy Irving, Lili Taylor, and Jeanne Tripplehorn starring in the Lanford Wilson translation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. Helmed by Scott Elliot, whose *Present Laughter* has injected full-frontal nudity into Noël Coward, *Sisters* is sure to have surprises.

■ Joe Mantello (the critical spotlight has mercifully shifted from him to Elliot),

breaks in the newly renovated Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater

with *God's Heart*, by Craig Lucas. An urban fantasy about three couples, it's a move in a darker direction from the writer of the

Broadway's sentimental *Prelude to a Kiss*.

■ Alfred Uhry and Dana Ivey positively combusted in 1987's *Driving Miss Daisy*. They join up again in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. The plot—two

Jewish cousins prepare for a society dance in Atlanta in 1939—sounds like a heavenly

cross between *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Steel Magnolias*.

■ Horton Foote's long-delayed, Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Young Man From Atlanta* finally gets its Broadway run next month. Catch it now at Chicago's Goodman Theater.

■ Encores!, which revives classic musicals for five performances only, kicks off its 1997 season with Neil Simon, Burt Bacharach, and Hal

David's *Promises, Promises*, at New York's City Center. Last year's sizzling *Chicago*

transferred to Broadway, and *One Touch of Venus* heralded the birth of a new diva

in Melissa Errico, so this year's tickets are hotter than Madonna's baby pictures.

■ For up-to-the-nanosecond theater news—or to buy tickets—log onto Playbill Online (via America Online or at <http://www.playbill.com>).—MARISA COHEN

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ROBERT TRACHTENBERG/OUTLINE; MALUCCI/WALLS/OUTLINE; DAVID ROSE/SYGMA; STEPHEN DANIELIAN; CATHERINE MCGANN/OUTLINE; JOSHUA KESSLER; SUZANNE HANOVER