

Zodiac a sign of the '70s

ALYSSA ROSENBERG
The Washington Post

Pop culture anniversaries tend to be occasions for gauzy nostalgia or vigorous defences of the places various pieces of art ought to have in the canon. I don't feel any need to defend David Fincher's *Zodiac*, one of the greatest movies yet released this century, which arrived in theatres 10 years ago this week. And I don't feel warm and fuzzy about it either.

The great thing about *Zodiac*, which tracks the search for the serial killer of the same name, is the way it adds an eerie, record-scratch of a scream below the gloomy moment when the promises of the 1960s seemed to be curdling, and the sense of malaise and decline that would characterize the 1970s was setting in. *Zodiac* is a movie about how uncertainty and institutional failure will drive you mad, and as a result, it's more relevant than ever.

The first scene in the movie begins with the song *Easy to Be Hard*, from the musical *Hair*, floating out of a car radio as two lovers meet. The song is a plea for people who

espouse high principles of love and kindness to live up to those values in their personal lives. The sequence ends with gunshots and Donovan's *Hurdy Gurdy Man*, a track that explicitly positions "songs of love" as a kind of babbling shtick. The dream is, quite literally, dead.

The movie, and the search for the killer that follow, capture the limits of both law enforcement agencies and newspapers to find the truth. Fincher captures the uncertainty and loss of confidence that follow from a prolonged failure by institutions and people who are doing everything they're supposed to, only to find that it doesn't produce the correct results.

Zodiac conveys this so convincingly because Fincher got three astonishing performances out of his lead actors.

The year before *Iron Man* returned him to Hollywood's A-list, Robert Downey Jr. was first charmingly — and then worryingly — dissolute as *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Paul Avery. When *Zodiac* begins, Avery is an experienced journalist with a bit of counter-culture edge, cool enough to school young



Robert Downey Jr., left, and Jake Gyllenhaal in *Zodiac*. Mark Ruffalo, inset.

editorial cartoonist Robert Graysmith (Jake Gyllenhaal), but still eager enough to get slammed on Aqua Velvas with his younger colleague.

Avery's spine melts into relaxation during his first visit to the bar with Graysmith, and he never quite gets it back. After he receives a Zodiac letter threatening him person-



ally, Avery's long hair, increasingly gray, stops looking like a deliberate fashion choice, and begin to look like the result of a man who can't quite keep himself together.

By the end of the movie,

Avery's living in a nest-like mess on a houseboat, wearing dirty clothes, taking hits of oxygen and ranting bitterly at Graysmith. Downey Jr. brought out the rage and vulnerability of Avery's deterioration; he mocks Graysmith for his obsession, but Avery has shrunk his own life down to a tiny, defensible space.

As Graysmith, Gyllenhaal's large eyes — always one of his most powerful acting tools — make him look first like a

woodland creature and later like a skull. When the movie begins, Graysmith is a wincingly attentive single dad, cutely awkward in editorial meetings. But when he begins decoding his first Zodiac letter, using his fondness for puzzles to turn the sinister array of symbols into a decipherable but even more sinister message, it's as if Graysmith can't stop seeing codes and clues everywhere.

And San Francisco detective Dave Toschi (Mark Ruffalo) begins to wilt under the pressure of his own image. Even as he becomes the inspiration for Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) in the *Dirty Harry* movies, he's unable to find definitive evidence that would link his best suspect, Arthur Leigh Allen (John Carroll Lynch) to the killings, and when Toschi meets the man in person, Allen is a polite, unflappable blank.

Ten years after *Zodiac* was released, and almost 50 years after the July 4 killing that sets the movie in motion, we're still living with and working through the consequences of the decline and loss of faith David Fincher captured in this masterful film.

Bee Nation big buzz at Hot Docs

A film about Saskatchewan students competing in the first provincewide First Nations Spelling Bee will help kick off this year's Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival.

Organizers say *Bee Nation* will be the opening-night film for the Toronto fest, which runs April 27 to May 7.

Guests expected to attend the festival include famed scientist Bill Nye, who's the subject of the doc *Bill Nye: Science Guy*.

A total of 230 titles from 58 countries will screen at the 24th edition of Hot Docs.

Other highlights include *Becoming Bond*, about the only man to play the role of James Bond just once, and *House of Z*, about fashion designer Zac Posen.

Canadian-focused docs include *My Enemy, My Brother*, about two former enemies from the Iran-Iraq War who meet in Vancouver



Bee Nation opens this year's Hot Docs fest. Bill Nye, above.

25 years later.

The Road Forward is a genre-bending musical documentary that looks at developments in the 1930s that led to First Nations activism today. In *A Better Man*, co-director Attiya Khan meets with her ex-boyfriend who abused her

on a daily basis 22 years ago to see if he's willing to take responsibility for his actions.

Syria is featured in several titles, including *Hell on Earth: The Fall of Syria and the Rise of ISIS*, *69 Minutes of 86 Days* and *A Memory in Khaki*.

Oscar-nominated Canadian



filmmaker Atom Egoyan will also host an onstage discussion with acclaimed director Joe Berlinger, who will present the international premiere of *Intent to Destroy*, about the Armenian genocide. The fest will also feature a 25th anniversary screening of his doc *Brother's Keeper*.

Earlier this month, organizers announced the festival has added a \$50,000 Rogers Audience Award for best Canadian feature-length film. The director of the winning doc will receive the prize on the final night of the festival before a special encore screening.

— The Canadian Press

Harrelson gives up 30-year pot habit

NEW YORK — Woody Harrelson has given up marijuana after decades of what he calls partying too hard.

The actor is one of Hollywood's most well-known marijuana enthusiasts. Harrelson tells *Vulture* that he hasn't

smoked pot in nearly a year.

He cites "30 solid years" of partying for his decision to quit. He also says he felt like the drug was "keeping me from being emotionally available." Still, he has nothing bad to say about marijuana, which he calls "a great drug."

The 55-year-old says he still drinks alcohol in moderation.

Harrelson was arrested in 1996 for planting hemp seeds in Kentucky in order to challenge a state law. Hemp is a relative of marijuana, but has a lower concentration of THC, the substance that makes pot smokers high.

— The Associated Press

