

COVER STORY

LEO'S ON
THE MONEYCATCH
A WAVE

Australian Surf Movie Festival brings two bodacious features, plus shorts, to The Astor on Tuesday and The Espy on Wednesday. Tix from \$15: asmf.net.au

TIME TO SCREEN
THE OPPOSITION

Before *The Wolf of Wall Street's* release today, Aussie moviegoers had only seen one of the 2014 Best Actor Oscar nominees at work — Christian Bale in *American Hustle*. (Though *Hustle* has won several ensemble acting awards, Bale is yet to win an individual gong.) Over the next month, we'll finally see the competition DiCaprio — who snagged the Best Actor Musical or Comedy Award at the recent Golden Globes — and Bale are facing at the Academy Awards.

CHIWETEL EJIOFOR
in 12 YEARS A SLAVE

Ejiofor is Solomon, a free man kidnapped and sold into savage, tortuous slavery.

Opens: January 30

Vibe: History as horror

Awards in the bag: AACTA

International, critics' gongs from Kansas, San Francisco, DC, Boston, Austin, Florida, Chicago and Ohio

Oscar hook: After a decade as a director's favourite and actor's actor, Ejiofor's name is finally up in lights. If he wins he would be only the fifth black man to win Best Actor Oscar. Based on a true story.

MATTHEW McCONAUGHEY
in DALLAS BUYERS CLUB

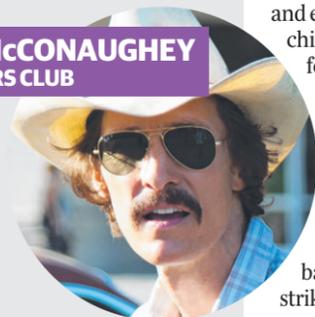
McConaughey is Ron, a HIV-positive homophobe who smuggles medication to help mostly gay fellow sufferers in the early days of AIDS.

Opens: February 13

Vibe: From trailer trash to accidental AIDS activist

Awards in the bag: Golden Globe, Rome Film Festival, Screen Actors Guild, critics' gongs from Dallas, Las Vegas, Phoenix

Oscar hook: From shirtless rom-com dude to serious actor on a serious roll. Lost 20kg-plus for role. Had to pitch in to get film funded. Based on a true story.



BRUCE DERN in NEBRASKA

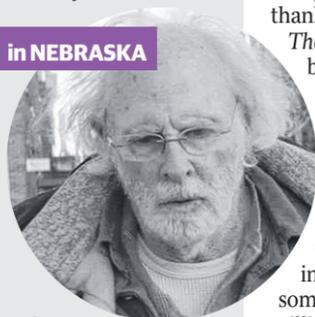
Dern is Woody, an ageing drunk and disappointment to his wife and sons, who tries to walk interstate to claim a \$1 million sweepstakes prize.

Opens: February 20

Vibe: Bittersweet comedy and love letter to family

Awards in the bag: Cannes, National Board of Review, LA Film Critics Association

Oscar hook: Industry veteran, relegated largely to support act his entire career, emerges from the wilderness for role of a lifetime, aged 77.

LEADER OF THE
WOLF PAC

Leonardo DiCaprio cements his reputation as one of the best actors of his generation playing a drug-addled, greedy money man, as **Tiffany Bakker** discovers

It's a freezing New York winter's day, and Leonardo DiCaprio is moving just a tad gingerly. Thanks to a mishap at his Los Angeles home, his ankle is bugged, and he's using a cane to help navigate around his hotel room.

"I sprained it on the floorboards at my house," he shrugs, slowly easing himself on to an uncomfortable looking couch. "I'm building a deck and I was showing the architect what I wanted done, so I somehow jumped through a floorboard and popped a couple of ligaments."

Of late he reckons he's been injury prone, adding that he also put his back out while filming one of the many drug scenes for his latest film, *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

"I was crawling around like some sort of slug for two days, and ended up at the chiropractor. I think my body forgets I'm not as young as I used to be."

It's sort of bizarre (and makes you feel positively ancient) to think that DiCaprio is nearing 40, a milestone he'll hit in November. That this is the baby-faced actor whose striking blue eyes so captivated a generation of hysterical teenage girls in *Romeo + Juliet* and *Titanic*. These days, there are a few more lines around those eyes, but it's as if his face has finally caught up with his career (he's a three-time Academy Award nominee).

Indeed, there are strong whispers he'll increase that tally, thanks to his performance in

The Wolf of Wall Street,

based on the memoirs of disgraced stockbroker Jordan Belfort. In a "pump and dump" share scam, Belfort fleeced investors out of some \$340 million in the late 1980s and early 1990s to fund a lavish lifestyle of helicopters, yachts, mansions and copious amounts of drugs.



DiCaprio says he'd been obsessed with the hedonistic nature of Belfort's memoir from the moment the book was published in 2007.

"The man is portraying the darker nature of himself in his own biography. I became obsessed with playing him because I felt he kind of represented everything that's wrong with America today."

DiCaprio, of course, has had his own reputation as a bit of a party boy with, like Belfort, a penchant for models (his latest is 21-year-old German supermodel Toni Garrn).

"You can't compare me to him," he snorts. "I've got nothing on Jordan Belfort."

The actor viewed the book as "this sort of financial underworld story" and wanted five-time collaborator Martin Scorsese to direct the film.

For Scorsese, embarking on another project with his protégé was a no-brainer.

"Filmmaking can be an arduous business, and there's absolutely nothing worse than working with people who don't want to be there, and Leo is never like

that," says Scorsese. "Aside from the fact that he's a terrific actor, every time we work together it goes further, and our working relationship gets deeper."

"We just like to hang out, we like being around each other, we really do."

In some ways, DiCaprio and Belfort could be two sides of the same coin. Both accumulated massive wealth at an early age (DiCaprio is said to be worth more than \$226 million), but both have handled their money in entirely different ways.

DiCaprio, a committed environmentalist and philanthropist, says he can understand where the urge for more stems from.

"Being a successful person myself, I honestly feel that the attitude is very twisted — the need to accumulate more and more wealth and consume more and more. I've met a lot of people like that in my industry and it almost becomes an obsession with them. Everything relates to more money and once you reach a certain bracket of wealth, that's not enough and you have to get more. And then that's not enough, and you have to get more again."

For Belfort, "more" was

"I felt he kind of represented everything that's wrong with America today"

LEONARDO DICAPRIO ON
STOCKBROKER JORDAN BELFORT



the film's more risqué scenes — one features him snorting cocaine off a woman's breast and another has him being whipped by a dominatrix. "It has an interesting idea for the placement of a burning car," DiCaprio had no reservations.

"When you do a character like this, you have to go all in," he says. "You can't pull any punches."

Then there's the fact that he's never shown on screen with flabby skin, it was all me."

(*The Wolf of Wall Street* now holds the dubious title of the film where the F-word is uttered most frequently, a staggering 506 times.)

Jonah Hill, who shares some of the film's most debauched scenes with DiCaprio, says the star, "I learned so much from him and he's so good, it makes you better."

"To act in a scene with you have to not be horrible because he's so good."

Since shooting on the film wrapped last January,

never enough. He made \$49 million the year he turned 26, but was furious he didn't reach \$52 million, "because it was three shy of a million a week".

DiCaprio says he liked the fact that Belfort and his cronies "aren't the movers and shakers of Wall Street, these are really street urchins that are trying to emulate Gordon Gekko".

The only reservation he had was that the audience would "tune out" because the behaviour of the protagonists is so appalling. (Jonah Hill is extraordinary as Belfort's repulsive partner in crime, Donnie, and Aussie Margot Robbie cements her status as a star on the rise as Belfort's wife Naomi.)

DiCaprio dismisses accusations the film glorifies Belfort's crimes. (Belfort only ended up serving 22 months of his four-year jail sentence, after cooperating with the FBI).

"We don't give these people any moral compass whatsoever," he says. "We're not apologising for their actions. I think we're portraying them for what they were and what their motivations were, and we're not giving them some false sense of sympathy for an audience."

There's also the matter of some of

K

nes;
g
asts,
g
who
the
andle.
ions.
cter
out,"
y
at we
nan
a. "It
ll the
t also
le of
id is
a
s some
ned
ys of
ch
d that
him
e,
film

DiCaprio, aside from various promotional duties for both *The Wolf Of Wall Street* and *The Great Gatsby*, has been "taking a break". There's been talk of a future Sinatra biopic with Scorsese, but DiCaprio is quite happy "not to have any movies lined up at all". He says his past three films — *Django Unchained*, *The Great Gatsby* and *The Wolf Of Wall Street* have "been like a little trilogy for me".

"They've all been about the corruption of the American dream, and I didn't really realise that until I did these movies," he explains. "I was like, wow, there has been this theme. Now, I need to go away and think about what comes next."

SEE THE WOLF OF WALL STREET OPENS TODAY.

After three films on "the corruption of the American dream" Leonardo DiCaprio is happy to take a break and think about what he will do next.

/JOHN SHEARER/INVISION/AP



The lady now sings the blues

A move from man to woman gives Laura Jean Grace's lyrics an edge fans can dance to, writes **Kathy McCabe**

Laura Jean Grace will measure the success of the new *Against Me!* album by how many people dance to the songs.

That may sound like the same bar used by every other artist on the planet who trades in rock, pop or, well, dance music. But when your record is called *Transgender Dysphoria Blues* and several of the songs explore Grace's transition from man to woman, one might expect that impacting people's minds and hearts may have been a greater goal than getting them on their feet.

Not so, says Grace, born Tom Gabel who came out as transgender in 2012.

"It's a balancing act between having lyrics that mean something and go deeper and hoochie mamma melodies," she says. "You want to make people dance to pain. But it has to sound decent."

Against Me! made it easy for the frontwoman to put herself out there. They built their own studio and produced the album themselves but then had to find a new recording home when a tree crashed through the roof during a storm.

"All of that became such a focus that you don't obsess as much as a songwriter; it freed me up in a weird way," she says. "And when the tree fell through the roof, I took that as a sign that it was time to finish the record before someone dies."

"In a lot of ways, making this record was a refuge. Coming out was rough and I was feeling like I needed to shield myself and hide out for a second."

While there is no escaping the directness of Grace's story

in the title track or *True Trans Soul Rebel*, Grace has also balanced the album with other personal tales of love and loss.

The death of a friend offered yet another perspective on a life in transition.

"A friend of mine died, and ... when things like that happen you realise how precious time is, how the most unexpected things happen and change everything, every aspect of your life," Grace says.

"There have been many points over the last year or two where I have had those reflective moments and thought there was no way I could have imagined when I

was 26 what my life would be like right now at 33."

The fans on the whole have accepted Grace's transgender without missing a beat.

"For the most part, fans of the band have been completely supportive, beyond my wildest dreams," she says.

"I had no idea what to expect. It is interesting seeing more so the dynamic you get in other situations with other bands that maybe you have toured with or people you know on the punk scene on a more personal level."

Against Me! is currently in negotiations for an Australian tour, which Grace hopes is "sooner than later".

"You know I want Australia to adopt me," she says.

"A lot of the lyrics were actually written in Australia — *Unconditional Love*, that's totally all Roland S. Howard."

"I took that as a sign that it was time to finish the record before someone dies"

HEAR TRANSGENDER DYSPHORIA BLUES OUT TOMORROW