



## STOP, LOOK & LISTEN...

### *Cinema that matters from First Run Features*

Documentaries are all the rage now; perhaps it's our need for realism in these days of endless political commentary and "spin". When I was a kid, I secretly loved watching documentaries in class (while most of the kids would moan and groan). I did back then, and hell, I still do...and it seems that today's audiences want to watch them as well. With so much information at the tips of our fingers - thanks to the Internet - and cable channels scrambling to air documentaries that capture timely issues of fickle public interest, this once overlooked genre is now outselling "blockbuster" movies at the box office and winning major film awards. Case in point, *FAHRENHEIT 9/11*, the politically charged, controversial, yet groundbreaking money-maker by director **Michael Moore**. With this in mind, you can imagine what the market is now primed for in regards to documentaries on DVD. Back in the day, you could order your favorite documentary after its initial showing on national TV; just call this number and donate this amount to your local Public Television Station and you'll get your very own documentary on Thomas Jefferson, or the planets, or the subtle hunting skills of the cuttlefish or whatever. But now things are far different; thanks to these digital video discs of joy, you can view (and own!) just about anything created on film and video, including documentaries - and more importantly - the kind of documentaries you would not likely see on television but in movie art houses. This brings to mind one of my favorite film distributors, First Run Features, an independent film company specializing in independent and foreign films, but also independent documentaries. Note that I say "independent" a few times. These days, if you want to watch anything even remotely fresh and interesting, it almost has to be made and distributed independently, because innovative, cutting edge film could be a tough sell for big companies who are more worried about their bottom line than the quality of the content in their films. And thank goodness for companies like First Run Features (FRF), who pride themselves on offering consumers distinctive filmmaking, intriguing subject matter and a truly inspired inventory of alternative, foreign and documentary films. From searing social documentaries like *BEFORE STONEWALL (FIRF911030DVD)*, an epic chronicle of the gay and lesbian movement in America, to political documentaries like *A PERFECT CANDIDATE (FIRF911009DVD)*, a weird, twisting ride into the vortex of the American political system via the 1994 Virginia senate campaign of **Oliver North** (*this is without a doubt one of the most astute portraits of the modern political process ever filmed. —ALL MOVIE GUIDE*), whatever it is you are interested in, you'll surely find it somewhere in FRF's

extensive catalog. Other engaging films spotlighting some of the most fascinating figures of modern times include FIDEL: THE UNTOLD STORY (FIRF910705DVD), a brilliant, controversial, and yes, sympathetic film portrait of Cuban President **Fidel Castro**, THE TRIALS OF HENRY KISSINGER (FIRF910736DVD), a compelling chronicle of the life and times of one of the most powerful men in American history and BROTHERS IN ARMS (FIRF91127DVD), a memoir of presidential candidate **John Kerry**'s military experience in Vietnam as told by the men who fought next to him. And, this is just a tiny slice into their rich catalog of exquisite documentaries. But FRF are not limited to documentaries alone, they also release world-class theatrical and independent foreign films (check out their website, [www.firstrunfeatures.com](http://www.firstrunfeatures.com), for the entire listing, or ask your AEC sales rep for more information). What I find most interesting about First Run Features is that they are unafraid in their mission; FRF choose films of quality, and as a company are dedicated to making sure the personal film, political film and the alternative film survive and are available to an interested public. It's an ambitious pursuit, but a much needed one, especially for those who enjoy the adventure of forward thinking cinema.

—Nancy Casquarelli-Cardona