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being thought of as corny and generic.

It's a noir film, much of whose action – and a lot of it is opaque and hard to follow – takes place in air-conditioned corporate offices rather than in greasy back alleys and beat-up old dive bars.

A film about high-end malfeasance and the culture of boss-class corruption that doesn't, at least until a brutally edited ending, care very much for identifying the nature or the perpetrator of the crimes. It takes, perhaps cynically, cynicism for granted.

Wilkinson, who I've never seen give a bad performance, is excellent as the lawyer who discovers a secret document proving U/North's bad faith. He keeps us guessing whether Edens is insane or not, imbuing him with a vulnerability that's very much needed to stop him from becoming the kind of cracked, stomping thespian someone like Geoffrey Rush would play him as.

Up against him is Tilda Swinton as U/North's chief counsel, her face the complexion of a dentist's rubber glove, her hair distended like a shirt badly laid out on the end of an ironing board. She is utterly mesmerising, a woman compelled as much by her salary as by her own convictions, to perform to those around her with vicious disdain.

There's a lot to admire in Michael Clayton: Robert Elswit, who was also director of photography on Good Night, and Good Luck, captures the understated beauty of upstate New York's crisp, misted lanes in winter; Gilroy's script, except for one "But what if he wasn't crazy?" outburst, is very strong; one particular murder scene is as sudden and shocking as the Algerian father's throat-slitting scene in Hidden.

And yet, the film, whether by design or not, never really takes off. Clooney is part of the problem: for all his imminent dissolution, he always looks in control, his white shirt and black suit combo as dapper as anything he sports in Ocean's Eleven. He's not dirty or compromised enough, nor is the likelihood of him bringing wrong-doing to light ever in sufficient doubt.

In the end, the film, though it tries to be moodier and less narrative-driven than The Insider or Erin Brockovich, wraps up proceedings in the style of a heist movie, and in so doing contradicts the moral ambiguity it has spent so much time presenting.

Gypsy Caravan: When the Road Bends... PG cert, 116 min

• In pictures: Gypsy Caravan

It's curious how Roma travellers, so often reviled both here and abroad, so often strangers to our imaginations, are anything but strangers to the big screen. Time and again, they have appeared in the films of directors such as Emir Kusturica and Tony Gatlif.

What's more, recently bands such as Beirut, Gogol Bordello and Basement Jaxx, who issued a Balkan Beats compilation, have used and been inspired by the ferocious energy and keening passion of Roma music.

Gypsy Caravan, a fascinating and often very moving documentary by Jasmine Dellal, is a companion piece to her earlier, and equally excellent American Gypsy.

Shot by Albert Maysles, it follows musicians from India, Macedonia, Romania and Spain as they travel through North America on a six-week tour. As they do so, the performers, all of whom have faced terrible hardships and tragedies, exorcise their pain by sharing it with audiences who hear in every note the unconquerable spirit of freedom and fire and joy.

Music, says one of them, is "better than land, wisdom, or being father of a thousand sons".

The tour becomes a kind of homecoming, an opportunity for dispersed peoples to come together and share stories. So long seen as ragged leftovers from an older historical epoch, the Roma turn out to be a modern people who have a lot to teach over-developed societies about what it means to be human.

Mr Woodcock

12A cert, 88 min

Mr Woodcock, a mutant cousin of Meet the Parents, stars Seann William Scott (American Pie's Stifler) as a self-help guru who visits his mother (Susan Sarandon) in small-town Nebraska only to find out that she's dating the gym teacher (Billie Bob Thornton) who bullied him mercilessly at school. He soon ditches his smoothly-couched platitudes about the past being the past and tries to split up the pair.

Thornton does his best with a crass script and a cop-out finale. Scott looks like the kind of guru who would abduct, truss and chop up disciples before he'd nourish them with wisdom. It's left to Amy Poehler, as a ferocious, borderline alcoholic of a press officer, to steal the



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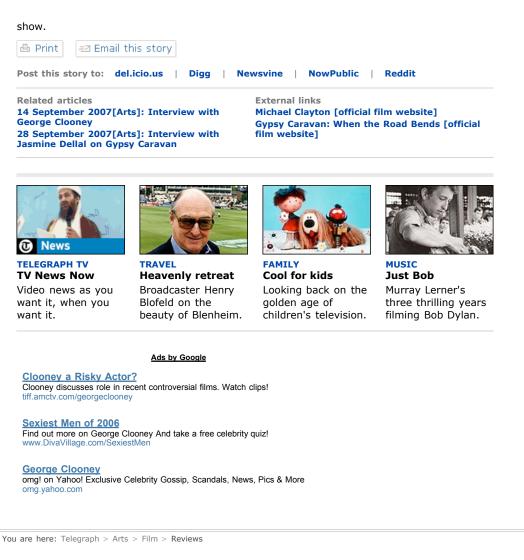
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