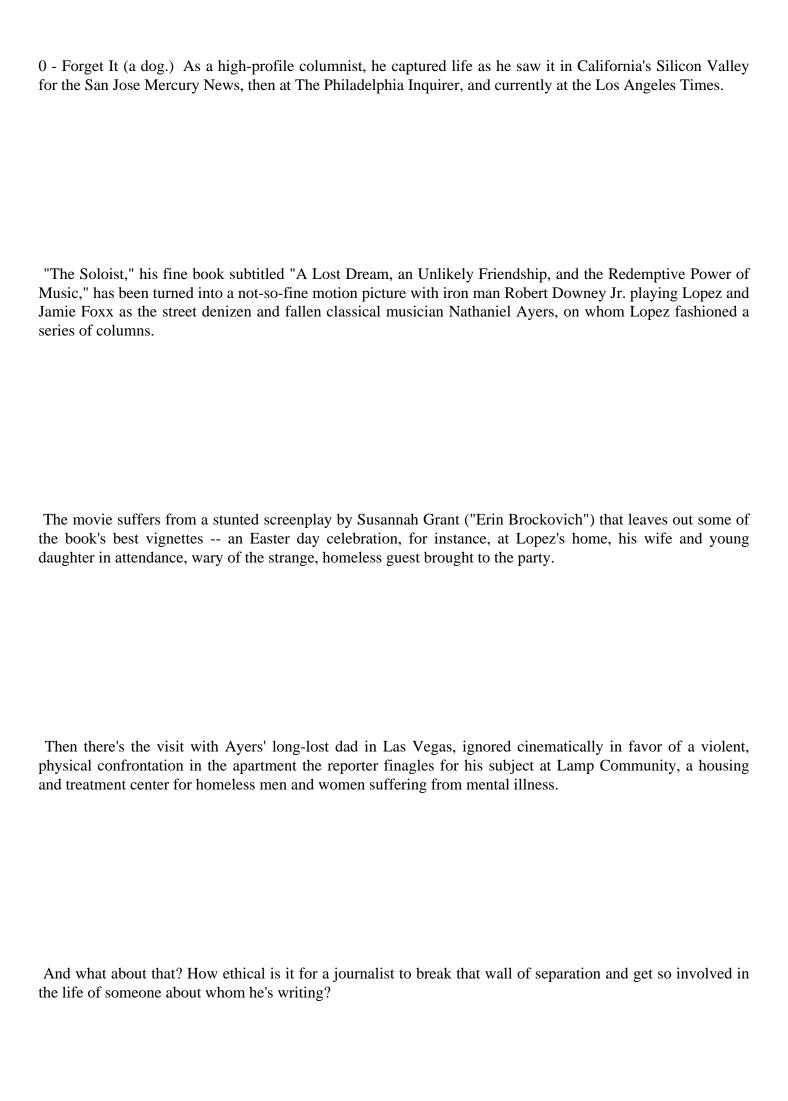
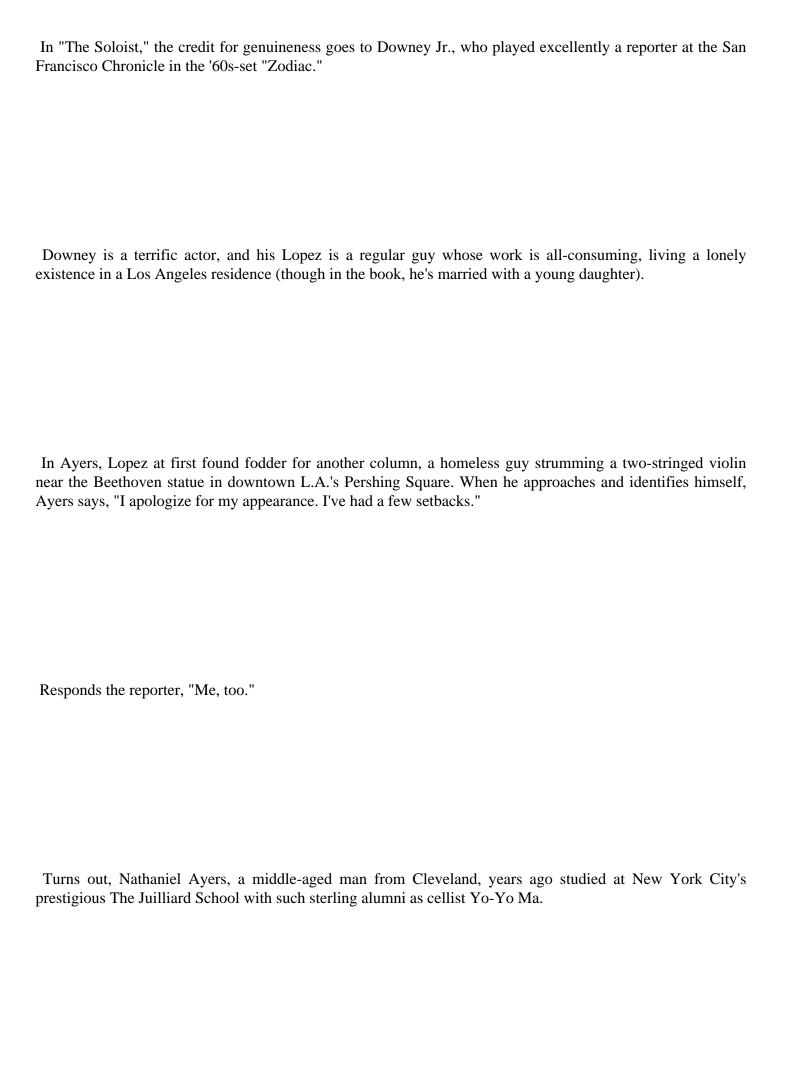
by Lee Grant Steve Lopez is a gifted writer, a journalist with a rare eye for the human condition, its struggles and its bliss. RATINGS GUIDE: 4 STARS - Excellent. 3 STARS - Worthy. 2 STARS - Mixed. 1 STAR - Poor.

Movie Review: 'Soloist' goes it alone, hits a lot of wrong notes



Grant could've used Lopez's touch his realistic approach to characters, less a treatise on mental illness and how society ignores this medical condition, more on an unusual friendship.
The most vibrant aspect of the film concerns Lopez's struggles at his newspaper, the downsizing all around him that's plaguing the newspaper business nationally.
As he writes columns pesky deadlines imminent there are wistful exchanges with his editor and ex-wife (captivating Catherine Keener). She's what you want in an editor a listener, supportive, someone who makes the pieces better.
The day he meets Foxx's Nathaniel Ayers, Lopez is on the prowl for his next column, and a good story, the panic of the blank computer screen looming. It's a better representation of a journalist than "State of Play," with its melodrama and stereotypical grubbiness of reporter Russell Crowe.



How did he get from there to here, living on the streets, pushing a shopping cart, playing his two-string violin in the dank Second Street tunnel that leads into a teeming and dangerous downtown?
The problem here is Foxx, the Oscar winner for impersonating Ray Charles, who finds nothing deeper in his Ayers character than occasional incoherent speech and bouts of schizophrenia.
The actor is the victim of Hollywood makeup and wardrobe, his get-up of multicolored rags identifying him as a street person. In the credits: "Dental Special Effects for Mr. Foxx."
There are scenes of the young actor Justin Martin at home (as a teenage Nathaniel) in Cleveland discovering his talent. The lone black face at Juilliard, he begins to hear voices, mental demons taking over. These depictions are tight, fascinating, how a musical brilliance was lost in the blur of mental illness.
British director Joe Wright ("Atonement") films L.A.'s Skid Row as slices of hell, which no doubt is so, but the view from Lopez's car window and his guarded neighborhood strolls are designed simply for shock. We're shocked, but not moved.

The movie steers away from Ayers' racial, sometimes anti-white demeanor, more pronounced in the book. And what about the swastikas scratched on the wall in his Lamp apartment?
There's a scene where Lopez sleeps outside in a storefront next to his column subject, fending off rats, observing the parade of junkies and hookers. Says Ayers, "Do you think about writers, Mr. Lopez, the way I think of musicians?" They should be thinking about movies that matter.
"The Soloist." Rated: PG-13. Running time: 1 hour, 52 minutes. 2.5 stars.
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