Critics' Picks: 'The Artist,' 'Short Stories' and 'Rules of Civility'

Three things Seattle Times writers love this week: "The Artist," due out on DVD; Violist Melia Watras' new CD, "Short Stories"; and Amor Towles' debut novel, "The Rules of Civility," out in paperback.

DVDs

'The Artist'

Four months after winning the Oscar for best picture, "The Artist" finally comes out on DVD this Tuesday — so if you missed this black-and-white gem on the big screen, now's your chance. Set in a long-ago Hollywood, it's the tale of a silent movie actor (Jean Dujardin, also an Oscar winner) who sees his career wither away with the advent of talkies, just as a bouncy who's-that-girl (Bérénice Bejo) is on the rise. Lovely cinematography in a rainbow of grays, engaging storytelling with virtually no dialogue — and yes, a little dog, too (Uggie, charmingly stealing the movie). It's a joy.

Moira Macdonald, Seattle Times movie critic

CDs

Melia Watras, 'Short Stories'

How many voices does the viola have? Seattle violist Melia Watras conjures at least a dozen on her new CD, "Short Stories." Quincy Porter's "Speed Etude" for viola and piano zips by at a velocity that seems beyond the reach of human fingers. Works by Rebecca Clarke, Georges Enescu and Henri Vieuxtemps have a salon elegance. Solo viola pieces by Ligeti and Betsy Jolas are more dense and forbidding. Of the four previously unrecorded works, Anna Weesner's "Flexible Parts" is the most entrancing: six shapely vignettes exploring every viola/piano sound possibility, with Kimberly Russ' keyboard accompaniments a nimble pleasure throughout.

Michael Upchurch, Seattle Times arts writer

Books

'Rules of Civility'

This (F. Scott) Fitzgerald-esque novel by debut novelist Amor Towles is just out in paperback (Penguin). Set in 1938 Manhattan, "Rules" features whip-smart dialogue; a strong-willed heroine; and an almost painfully acute eye for the nuances of sex, love and class. Wherever you're headed for your summer reading, take it along.

Mary Ann Gwinn, Seattle Times book editor