

WELCOME TO THE UNIVERSE of writer-director Whit Stillman: any soothing thoughts will soon be upended by the nonstop caustic commentary that plays like a novel-of-manners audiobook on loop. In this social order, rules about how to behave are so deeply ingrained in people's minds that nobody really questions them; they just head to the next party, the next European city, the next dysfunctional relationship with someone well-dressed and depressed. In the pilot episode of *The Cosmopolitans*, the next victims of life's letdowns include three adult boys (Adam Brody, Adriano Giannini, Jordan Rountree) living in Paris, just because, along with a slender brunette (Carrie MacLemore), who has traveled to Europe after a break-up. These upscale drifters engage in verbal spars, picking on their friends' most pathetic traits, no doubt in order to distract themselves from their own deep insecurities. Sounds like a recipe for intense drama, but we never see it happen: break-ups and other misfortunes are merely alluded to in dialogue among smart people, obsessing about the lives of others until the air is buzzing with social anxiety and witty remarks.

With its crisp digital look and plenty of match cuts (from faucet to river to wine glass), *The Cosmopolitans* will cater to the demands of a television audience looking for the next *Gossip Girl*, but it lacks the high-stakes drama that leaves us craving more. The most exciting moment comes when the boys finally find a good party to go to in a mansion packed with older men and innocent girls—and then are promptly kicked out. Given that television has moved on to an era when bold and adventurous women hold their own, this pilot seems in need of some sort of deus ex machina (a lunatic ex-girlfriend on drugs, perhaps) to up the ante. Fans of the program, like its characters, will probably stay involved in this world out of nostalgia for a mode of socialization that resembles boarding school or college—whichever was less traumatic.—*Morgan Wilcock*

DOCUMENTARY PICK | *A Brief History of Time* | Criterion, \$39.95

IF THERE'S A FILMMAKER UP for the task of capturing on film the workings of a brilliant mind—and an idiosyncratic personality—it's Errol Morris. His 1992 documentary is a fitting aesthetic complement to physicist Stephen Hawking's best-selling book, *A Brief History of Time*, in that it conveys multiple planes of interiority: Hawking's own life story, his hypothesis on relativity and the origin of the universe, and his musings on the mystifying nature of memory and divinity. When not featuring Hawking's voiceover via his speech-synthesizer device, the soundtrack delivers accounts of his theorems from scientist colleagues, family



members' memories of his pre-ALS days as a rowdy Oxford boy, and the compositional flux of longtime Morris collaborator Philip Glass. Visually kinetic, this colorful multidimensional portrait manages to take us from Hawking's home in South England to the far reaches of the cosmos.—*Morgan Wilcock*