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Pearl Harbor delivers war and romance but not history

By Joseph Jeong
Professionally critical

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Starring: Ben Affleck, Josh Hartnett, and Kate Beckinsale

Director: Michael Bay

Studio: Touchstone

Runtime: 183 minutes

Rating: ★★

Epics usually either succeed beyond one's imagination (a la *Braveheart*) or just flat out fail miserably (a la *Costner's Waterworld* and *The Postman*). *Pearl Harbor* is an epic, but it does neither. The movie has its share of moments, but it is also bogged down by its fair share of flaws and inconsistencies.

The Michael Bay and Jerry Bruckheimer partnership is known for producing action-packed, explosion-filled summer blockbusters and not award-winning, critically acclaimed *Castle Rock*-like movies. Randall Wallace, the screenwriter, has confessed, much to the chagrin of history buffs, that he developed the plot line before doing his historical research. Hence the movie takes certain liberties with history to fit the Hollywood movie mold. Knowing this going into the movie, the historical inconsistencies or other flaws did not detract from the enjoyment in a manner that typically accompanies action movies.

The problem that *Pearl Harbor* cannot overcome is not its historical inaccuracies, but the inconsistency of its story telling. The biggest flaw with *Pearl Harbor* is its inability to decide if it is a love epic or a war epic. Hence, the movie doesn't flow quite as smoothly as it could.

Pearl Harbor starts out with the

love side backdropped against the start of World War II. We are introduced to our two male leads Rafe McCawley and Danny Walker, played by Ben Affleck and Josh Hartnett respectively, as two young kids growing up together on a farm somewhere.

The story moves forward to 1941 where Rafe and Danny are pilots for the US Army, essentially the predecessors of *Maverick* and *Goose* of *Top Gun* fame. Cue the entrance of the female lead Evelyn Johnson, a Navy nurse, played by Kate Beckinsale. In typical Hollywood fashion, with two male leads and one female lead, a love triangle ensues.

Setting up the whole love triangle takes up about a third of the movie. Hence in typical Bay & Bruckheimer fashion, we suddenly shift gears to become an epic war movie. The bombing of Pearl Harbor begins, and big explosions fill the screen. This whole sequence can't compare to *Saving Private Ryan's* intense introduction, but it isn't too shabby either. Perhaps the biggest gripe might be that the horror and emotional impact of the bombing isn't conveyed as fully as the thrill and action of this big explosion sequence.

The aftermath of the bombing sees Rafe and Danny being selected for a "top secret" mission, or as Rafe describes it in the movie, "the kind that gets you a medal, but the medal gets sent to your relatives".

The training for the mission is very typical of any other action movie, and the resolution is somewhat similar. Take a quick guess how the love triangle is resolved. On one hand, we have Ben Affleck, an established \$20 million superstar, and

on the other, we have Josh Hartnett, a relative unknown except to horror aficionados; who do you think gets the girl at the end of the movie?

Affleck's performance was decent, as he can play the suave hero very well since it is familiar territory for him. However, he was not at all convincing as the bumbling hero with a country accent (which pretty much disappears completely when he switches to suave hero mode).

Jon Voight as President Roosevelt

The biggest flaw with *Pearl Harbor* is its inability to decide if it is a love story or a war epic.

proved somewhat inappropriate, as he did play the part quite convincingly, managing to look too healthy for a polio-stricken president. Hartnett's part could catapult him into the league of lead actors in Hollywood should this movie become a huge success. Beckinsale's role doesn't demand much besides looking pretty on the screen and appearing to be love-stricken for much of the movie, so it's hard to pass judgement on her acting ability, although she was excellent in *Last Days of Disco*.

This brings up another big flaw with this movie, which is the role of Cuba Gooding Jr. Gooding plays a cook on board one of the ships who earns a Medal of Honor by manning one of the guns during the attack. This actually occurred, and



By Andrew Cooper / SMPSP

Rafe McCawley (Ben Affleck) and Evelyn Johnson (Kate Beckinsale) share an embrace in *Pearl Harbor*. Was there any doubt who would get the girl?

the cook's name was Doris "Dorie" Miller.

The Gooding tangent served as more of a distraction rather than an interesting subplot. This anecdote seems more an afterthought than anything else, a misguided attempt to convince audiences that *Pearl Harbor* is really historically accurate.

Even with all this ranting about the flaws of the movie, *Pearl Harbor* isn't without its merits, which seems to be a problem with many recent Bay and Bruckheimer efforts (i.e. *Armageddon*).

But as for this summer's first epic, *Pearl Harbor*, certainly there are worse ways to spend three hours of your time this weekend.

Blues Traveler's *Bridge* stands up

By Alan Back
Edits with a machete

Band: Blues Traveler
Album: *Bridge*
Label: A&M
Rating: ★★

The last offering from Blues Traveler, *Straight On Till Morning*, was four years and one bassist ago. Founding member Bobby Sheehan died of a drug overdose in 1999, leaving his three bandmates wondering whether they still had a future together.

They were right to think long and hard about this; the jam-band scene they helped to launch in the early 1990s has changed greatly. Three of its cornerstones—Phish, the Spin Doctors, the Dave Matthews Band—have either closed up shop or moved away from the loose, open atmosphere they rode to stardom.

This crew chose the latter option, adding guitarist Chan Kinchla's brother Tad on bass and Ben Wilson to cover keys and expand the sound. *Bridge*, their sixth studio album, came out last month and finds them tightening up their game considerably. The new vibe comes through as soon as the opening

track "Back in the Day" starts up; John Popper sounds unusually mellow and puts his harmonica into the back seat. (Unthinkable to longtime fans, but here you are.)

The first single, "Girl Inside My Head," follows this up and is sure to leave you asking, "Are these the same people who did

Are these the same people who did "Run-around"? Of course not. *Bridge* trades the band's earlier approach for a chance to refine its songs.

"Run-around"? Of course not. The focus of the album leans toward precision in songwriting, trading in the band's past shower-of-notes approach. It's the same mindset they used for *Straight On* but not to such an extent that the end result sounds too intricate and overdone.

Wilson and Tad do well in the spotlight ("Girl," "Rage") and as part of the ensemble.

Things get a little soggy and off balance at times, especially during the last third of the disc, but when it all comes together, the five-man lineup delivers on its promises and even recalls the original group's work. "You Reach Me" and "All Hands" carry strong echoes of the early-'90s albums *Save His Soul* and *Travelers and Thieves*, respectively, and are two of the best cuts of this latest bunch. Chan and drummer Brendan Hill leave lots of fingerprints all over these.

Frustration and sadness at Sheehan's death bubble to the surface on several cuts, with "Pretty Angry" being the best example. This one feels very much like a rehearsal, with everybody playing a few licks to warm up before Wilson starts in with a quiet piano line and nicely sets the example for everyone else to follow. It's good enough by itself, but with the upbeat "The Way" immediately following, it becomes even more effective.

Bridge's Blues Traveler's way of getting past the problems that have plagued them in recent years. It's not what die-hard followers are expecting—not by a long shot—but even the most grizzled veterans can change their style. And if they do it well, they deserve credit for it.



By Anton Corbijn / WARNER BROTHERS

R.E.M., one of the best things to ever come out of Athens, serves up another album. Long-time fans will especially enjoy *Reveal*, R.E.M.'s twelfth album.

R.E.M.'s newest album *Revealed*

By Jason Dean
Wanted to go for a swim

Band: R.E.M.
Album: *Reveal*
Label: Warner Brothers Records
Rating: ★★

R.E.M. is back on the shelves with *Reveal*, their twelfth full-length studio album. With it, they offer up a taste of the classic sound they're known for, while meshing in string arrangements as well as a spoonful of DJed samples. The album's first single, "Im-

itation of Life," marks a return to their early 90s style with an eerie resemblance to 99's "The Great Beyond," off the *Man on the Moon* soundtrack.

The album follows a theme of ascension—ironic considering their last album was titled *Up*. Says Mike Mills, "we built those songs brick by brick in the studio, with plenty of overdubs. For the new album, we played together in the studio, and I think the result has a warmer and more human di-

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Reveal

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mension."

Distraught by the exit of drummer and founding member Bill Berry, R.E.M. pressed on using a drum machine for *Up*, resulting in a disappointing, methodical drone. For *Reveal*, musicians Scott McCaughey, Ken Stringfellow and drummer Joey Waronker signed on.

Gone are the days when R.E.M. revolutionized music and brought "alternative" to the mainstream. Front man Michael Stipe had to go to drastic measures to get inspiration this time around. "I'd jump a plane whenever I got stuck. I'd go ... then come back, put it together and sing it," said Stipe.

You'd think with that much determination, the album would be less quirky. Many lines are tongue-in-cheek and disappointing and Stipe's struggling voice continues to deteriorate on this album.

What *Reveal* lacks lyrically is made up for in its beautiful music, however. Strings are scattered throughout many of the tracks, including a lovely, dark arrangement at the start of "Disappear." The work on piano and keyboards adds to the well-rounded portraits painted here.

Reveal offers hope that R.E.M. hasn't stopped making good music, even if they aren't getting any radio play. It may offer Warner Brothers a little hope as well, considering they signed the band to a record setting \$80 million, five-album deal in 1996.

For those who are searching for a substitute to the sell-out, "all image, no talent" modern rock that saturates the airwaves today, and for those die hard fans of the Athens boys, this album is a must-for your collection. For everyone else... let's just say Warner Brothers still won't profit from their signing of the band. Some would say R.E.M. has matured; others would counter they've just gotten old.

Moulin Rouge is too much scenery, not enough plot

By Jenny Sum
Has been to Disney World

MPAA Rating: PG-13
Starring: Nicole Kidman, Ewan McGregor, and John Leguizamo
Director: Baz Luhrman
Studio: Fox
Runtime: 126 minutes
Rating: ★★

Director Baz Luhrman brings to mainstream audiences *Moulin Rouge*, a musical period piece set in the Montmartre district of Paris in 1900. Among the riffraff of lowlife talents, Satine (Nicole Kidman), a courtesan and star of the Moulin Rouge, and Christian (Ewan McGregor) meet under literally tons of glittering confetti. Kidman and McGregor are the ones who make the movie worth-while, along with Jim Broadbent who plays the owner of the Moulin Rouge, and John Leguizamo who plays Toulouse-Latrec.

The plot is a stunningly conventional one. One could spend the whole movie wondering if Luhrman will throw a twist into the plot, but the movie never deviates from its cookie cutter story. Penniless writer meets the beautiful star of show, she mistakes him for a wealthy duke, and the two fall in love.

Kidman plays the role of Satine

with an enthusiastic silliness, contrasting with her earlier work in *Eyes Wide Shut* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. McGregor plays the poor and talented yet charming writer of the production for which the two are rehearsing. Of course, the real Duke of Monroth (Richard Roxburgh) is seeking out the beautiful Satine by becoming the benefactor of the production. Roxburgh plays an unconvincing villain, due to lax character development.

The colors and backdrop of the movie, while very detailed and unique, are eventually overwhelming. The nauseating collage of images make you feel as though you were on a ride at Disney, trying to take in as much as your eyes will allow. Luhrman destroys the film with jaunty camera work and fast-cutting camera angles. His freeze frames and jolting close-ups make caricatures out of the entire cast.

The ultimate eyecandy of the film is the surrealism of the sets. They truly make the viewer believe that this is a set for a grand musical. However, this movie musical simply cannot compare to any classic musicals. But who can fault the movie for lacking a Rodgers and Hammerstein to save it. Advice to Luhrman: Get out of Hollywood and head for Broadway.



By Ellen Von Unwerth / FOX

Moulin Rouge fails to deliver a plot, but Nicole Kidman's costumes manage to stay elaborate and luxurious the entire movie. Here Satine (Kidman) and Christian (McGregor) flaunt the debonair feel of the movie.

Exciter really excites, especially Depeche Mode fans

By Jon Kaye
Obviously enjoys techno

Band: Depeche Mode
Album: *Exciter*
Label: Reprise
Rating: ★★★★★

Having not released an album since 1997, Depeche Mode returns from obscurity with their latest release, *Exciter*.

Characteristic of Depeche Mode's unmistakable sound, *Exciter* features the elements of Euro-dance music, yet presents them in a way that the mainstream listener can appreciate. Marked with intense, repetitive, electronic rhythms, this album draws the listener into a synthetic world of technological beauty while at the same time grounding him with rich, powerful lyrics.

Exciter begins with a slight de-

parture from Depeche Mode's usual style; "Dream On," the album's first top-forty single, shows a surprising acoustic guitar presence. Depeche Mode's skillful acoustic guitar blends with Dave Gahan's distinct voice to provide an ethereal quality on the strong opening track.

Played with the same confidence as the first track, the rest of the album confirms Depeche Mode's skill. As compared to the band's

better-known work, one will note that "Exciter" is uncharacteristically mellow. While clearly maintaining elements of the style that made them famous, Depeche Mode branches out on this release.

Simply put, "Exciter" definitely deserves a spin. Having sold albums since 1981, the band's musical prowess has only grown with age. This long-awaited release will not disappoint.