

'Cloverfield' falls short as monster movie

BY FRANKLIN CLINE
Reviewer

"Cloverfield" is not a standard monster movie, even though producer/nerd king J.J. Abrams cited two classic monsters, King Kong and Godzilla, as his primary sources of inspiration. Although the plots are remarkably similar, "Cloverfield" is a failed attempt at a 21st century American monster movie, replete with overt allusions to 9/11 and YouTube.

All of this is wrapped in a very simple plot: something (and for the sake of those who haven't seen it, I won't say what, but it's pretty sweet) is attacking New York City. This thing in question is big enough to decapitate the Statue of Liberty, take out the Brooklyn Bridge, topple a few skyscrapers, withstand massive quantities of military fire and kill thousands of people. What makes this film unique is not its plot, but rather the way in which this simple plot is told: from a single handheld camera manned by Hudson Platt (played by the very goofy T.J. Miller), who has been given the task of recording his best friend Rob's goodbye party that takes place on the night of the creature's attack.

Here's where the YouTube aspect comes in. This is a film made for an audience conditioned to watching shaky, in-the-moment footage captured by anyone with a camera phone. One of my friends was so disoriented by the almost-always moving camera that he had to leave the film early, which recalls the mania surrounding the "motion sickness" many felt during initial screenings of "The Blair Witch Project." In fact, "Blair Witch" and "Cloverfield" have a lot in common — after all, both totally lacked objective storytelling, leaving the viewer with a radically unclear version of the big picture. Both relied upon using realistic elements to tell an unrealistic story.



Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures
Matt Reeves directs an action-packed thriller about five young New Yorkers who try to escape the wrath of a King Kong-like monster. The movie brought in \$41 million at the box office.

Both heavily utilized the Internet for promotion, allowing the viewer to piece together that bigger picture. And both, ultimately, centered around annoying, unlikable characters simply trying to survive.

The key difference between the two (aside from the antagonist, of course) is the eerie way in which "Cloverfield" centers around terrorism, hence the post-9/11 label applied earlier. Yes, I know it's trite, but it's true — Reeves and Goddard certainly were trying to invoke a gloomy tone and confusing mixture of solidarity and alienation as a direct result of an attack, not to

mention that the attack takes place in New York City and involves decapitating what many consider to be liberty's metaphor turned concrete.

However, it's not that I found the allusion offensive or even misguided so much as I found it confusing. What exactly is the point of not-so-subtly recalling 9/11 in this film? Is it subconsciously meant to unnervingly true American in us? Is this a great statement that we, American consumers of commercial art, have simultaneously become incredibly involved in reality television/YouTube and disconnected from our own individual fears to the

extent that even for fiction, we now require invocations of genuine tragedy in order to be emotionally affected or even involved?

These are lingering questions that remain unanswered, a strange artistic move that the film's basic structure relies upon. Remember, there's only one point of view for the entirety of the film, which leaves a lot of room for a bigger picture to be discussed around the water cooler, on online message boards or even internally as the credits roll. True, the film is peppered with snippets of caught-on-the-fly news reports (and some justifiably roll

Movie Review

"Cloverfield"

Directed by Matt Reeves
Paramount
Bad Robot
Released: Jan. 18

Rating



their eyes at the silly convolution of watching a film in which someone is filming a news report on television) and momentary snatches of what could potentially be whole other films: mothers calling for daughters, people looting electronics stores or police officers shepherding hundreds of confused, scared residents through barren streets. But none of these are concentrated upon. They're left only as brief images, tiny pieces of — you guessed it — a bigger picture.

Ultimately, "Cloverfield" fails as a horror film about as much as it succeeds. There are times at which it is exhilarating — there's a totally awesome tunnel sequence in the middle of the movie lit entirely by night-vision that perfectly utilizes the handheld-camcorder aspect and a pretty remarkable bird's-eye-view sequence toward the end of the film — but those moments are overshadowed by many factors: the initial monotony of the party, the boring, pallid characters, the lack of real action (much of the film is spent running around confusedly or hiding) and again, the unclear parallels between the attack and 9/11. It is an interesting film experiment, however, and is unmistakably American in its hedonism (and the way in which it revels, wide-eyed, in that hedonism).

Cuomo's pre-Weezer tracks disappoint listeners and fans

BY HARRY BURSON
Reviewer

Biding time before his band's next release, Weezer frontman Rivers Cuomo assembled a collection of solo recordings dating back 15 years. "Alone: The Home Recordings of Rivers Cuomo" offers a glimpse into the eccentric songwriter's creative process from the years before Weezer's eponymous 1994 debut to the present.

Love him or hate him, you can't deny Cuomo's knack for a hook. Singles from the band's first album, affectionately known as The Blue Album, such as "Buddy Holly" and

"Undone — The Sweater Song" were huge hits on alternative rock radio, providing a light-hearted relief from the serious, self-importance of grunge. The strength of the debut album and its more introspective, personal follow-up, "Pinkerton," won Weezer a rabid fan base that stuck with the group through a six-year hiatus while Cuomo sporadically attended Harvard.

Weezer released three disappointingly bland albums since its return to recording in 2001. Although these discs enjoyed commercial success, Cuomo's singing sounded bored and detached as he retreated from the naked, emotional songwriting that makes "Pinkerton" a compelling listen.

Unfortunately, too many of the songs on "Alone" are as well-mannered and boring as the recent Weezer albums, blending into an indistinguishable mix of forgettable melodies and underwritten lyrics. Duds like "Lemonade" and "Chess" never were developed beyond the demo stage for good reason: They're awful.

Among the forgettable demos, however, are a few standout tracks including a credible stab at Ice Cube's "The Bomb" and an overly emotional rendition of "The World We Love So Much" — an obscure song written by New Radicals singer Gregg Alexander.

These covers, along with the Dion hit "Little Diane," display a somewhat unexpected range of influences from someone who never has strayed too far from the sound of Cheap Trick's "At Budokan."

Of his own compositions, the only familiar song is an impressively fleshed-out demo of "Buddy Holly" showing Cuomo's considerable arranging skills even without a producer.

Another memorable track is a demo rejected for Weezer's next record. "This Is the Way" sounds like a contemporary R&B track complete with GarageBand-worthy drum loops and synthesizers. Although the melody and production are adequate, Cuomo sounds vaguely lost singing insipid love lyrics in an unfamiliar context.

The undeniable highlights of the collection come from a kooky, unfinished rock opera, using a narrative about spaceships and robots as a metaphor for Cuomo's apprehension concerning his sudden rise to fame.

Although the story he explained in his lengthy liner notes is silly, the two-minute rush of "Blast Off!" is the catchiest thing Cuomo has released in years — not to mention a verse sung as a robot through a vocoder, a type of synthesizer.

As strange as these songs are, it is refreshing to see Cuomo breaking from the mold that has made the last few Weezer albums so dull. I can only hope he will branch out and make the great pop album he just might have in him.

"The undeniable highlights of the collection come from a kooky, unfinished rock opera, using a narrative about spaceships and robots as a metaphor for Cuomo's apprehension concerning his sudden rise to fame."

Music Review

"Alone: The Home Recordings of Rivers Cuomo"

Rivers Cuomo
Label: Geffen

Released: Oct. 2, 2007

Rating:



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