

Beatles era resurfaces in new musical

BY BEN YARNELL
Index Staff

"Music is the only thing that makes sense anymore. Play it loud enough, and it keeps the demons at bay."

How true it is. This line, from Revolution Studio's new movie, "Across the Universe," is really talking about the 1960s and the issues that plagued that time. But today, the demons seem all too familiar. We have a war many feel is similar to Vietnam, and the fight for equal rights still is raging. They might as well be our demons.

"Across the Universe" is director Julie Taymor's attempt to keep a new millennium's demons at bay, to the tunes of the immortal Fab Four, the Beatles. With a background in musical theatre, a work as music-heavy as "Universe" seems a good fit for Taymor.

It's only fair to warn right off that if you are a die-hard fan of the lads from Liverpool, you might have trouble with the movie. I'm talking about the people who own the "White Album" in every format ever available and can prove Paul is dead. All of you amateur Beatles fans, start paying attention. This one is for you.

The basis for the story actually is very simple. Boy from Liverpool comes to America. Boy makes a friend. Boy meets friend's sister. They fall in love. Insert '60s era events. And there you have it.

Now, granted, if that were all the film were trying to achieve, it would be finished in about an hour and a half, the time it takes to watch an animated Disney movie. But, coming in at two hours and 20 minutes, you can expect several musical numbers that probably aren't all that necessary. And when those numbers do come around, don't expect their relevance to the plot to be handed to you on a silver platter. You are going to have to dig into the lyrics and the imagery to figure out how they all fit together. Just a hint: in "Strawberry Fields Forever," strawberry

juice is supposed to be blood.

One of the early issues with this movie is naming the characters. First off, it takes at least 30 minutes just to find out the names of the main players.

Then, once you do, get ready for a bit of a groaner. Surprise, surprise, they are all named after characters from songs. You have the main character (Hey) Jude, the love interest, Lucy (in the Sky with Diamonds), her brother Maxwell (Silver Hammer) and their friends (Dear Prudence, (Sexy) Sadie and JoJo (from Get Back). All of these characters do have actors behind them, although you aren't going to recognize a single one. "Universe" takes on a very no-name cast. The only recognizable names are Bono and Eddie Izzard, but they only stay on screen for maybe 10 minutes combined.

Once you get over the names and get them straight, you can start focusing on the real draw of the movie: the music. This, however, is something of a mixed bag. Taymor and her team essentially were handling sacred works, and to play with them can be volatile.

When it works, it works exceptionally well, like the new incarnation of "Let it Be," which is now a hauntingly beautiful Baptist spiritual that will bring a tear to your eye before it is over. However, when it is off, the music really can get out of hand, such as "Revolution 1," which turned into more dialogue than anything, coming off as trite and far too gritty. And sometimes, leaving the classics alone is the best treatment possible. Songs like "Hey Jude," "All You Need is Love" and "Why Don't We Do It in the Road" work fine as they are.

For those who aren't necessarily the biggest music buffs, there is more. The visual aspects of "Universe" are on a level you rarely see with this type of movie. The art and design direction simply outdoes itself the longer you watch.

However, those who know their Beatles know the rumors that illicit drug



Jim Sturgess plays Jude in Revolution Studios' "Across the Universe." The anti-war musical features legendary Beatles hits, such as "Strawberry Fields Forever," which tie into the '60s-reminiscent plotline.

use influenced some of their most famous later works. And, trust me, there are points when you will watch and wonder if the folks at the concession stand slipped something funny into your popcorn butter. In fact, just be ready for about 30 minutes where you will have no idea what the heck is going on. Just like when the music first came out, the further into the library, the more trippy the music is going to get.

So what does it all mean? "Across the Universe" is fun but serious. It is harsh but lovely. It is light-hearted but deep. "I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together," to quote the Walrus. In short, "Universe" is at least worth a shot.

Movie Review "Across the Universe"

Directed by Julie Taymor

Revolution Pictures

Released: Oct. 9, 2007

Rating



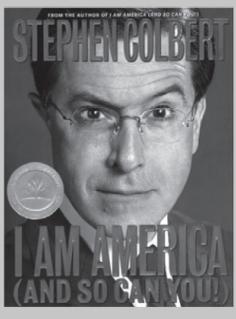
Stephen Colbert publishes his first book with familiar satire

Book Review

"I Am America (And So Can You!)"

by Stephen Colbert
Spartina Productions
240 pages

Rating



BY MARK COUCH
Reviewer

In 2005, Stephen Colbert left "The Daily Show" to host the Emmy-nominated "The Colbert Report," starring as "Stephen Colbert," a self-obsessed, over-the-top parody of conservative punditry. The Colbert persona has propelled a growing popularity for the show ever since its debut. Riding a strong current of success, "Stephen Colbert" has released his first book, "I Am America (And So Can You!)," part-autobiography, part-manifesto for the Colbert Nation, as he refers to his viewers. However, Colbert's energizing TV personality doesn't fully transfer to the printed word.

The core narrative of "I Am America" consists of Colbert plowing through a number of topics ranging from religion, the media, race, class, sex and science, ignor-

ing facts and tact as he hands down his ill-informed and outlandish opinions. Facts, of course, have a "liberal bias," Colbert says, so his knowledge and sense of "truthiness" comes straight from the gut.

Colbert's genius is in closely parodying conservative ideologues and their reasoning methods, and this talent is exercised well throughout the text. Avoiding criticism of specific political and policy issues, Colbert opines on many social and cultural aspects, stating his exaggerated viewpoints while coming off as unintentionally racist and homophobic at times, as is standard with the Colbert persona.

Much of the main narrative of the book is witty and entertaining, but it still lacks the complete, distinct flavor of "The Colbert Report." Although this book still is 100-percent Stephen Colbert, the full effect of the Colbert

personality that propels the nightly show is lost in translation to print form.

Copious footnotes and random thoughts litter the side margins, creating a sarcastic subtext similar to "The Word" segment on the show, though not always as poignant or funny. Many of the off-to-the-side comments and puns like, "Think books aren't scary? You can't spell 'book' without 'Boo!'" seem corny and lack the usual creativity Colbert otherwise brings to "The Colbert Report."

Timetables, flowcharts and even a couple pages of stickers are included, along with numerous images and witty phrases that loosely emulate the creative format and humor featured in "America: The Book," written by Jon Stewart and "The Daily Show" staff.

Apart from the book's core narrative are asides such as "Stephen Speaks For Me" and "Fun Zones" in every chapter that remain relevant to the topic discussed.

Whereas "America: The Book" featured an open-ended format allowing for a diverse array of material and humor, "I Am America (And So Can You!)" essentially

is limited in scope to one obnoxious pundit shouting his views. The format of "I Am America" becomes fairly repetitive, but the variety of different topics within the brief chapters keeps it interesting throughout.

One of the funniest parts of the book is the included transcript of Colbert's speech at the 2006 White House Correspondents' Dinner, where he stayed in character while satirizing Republican leaders and supporters as President Bush sat by watching.

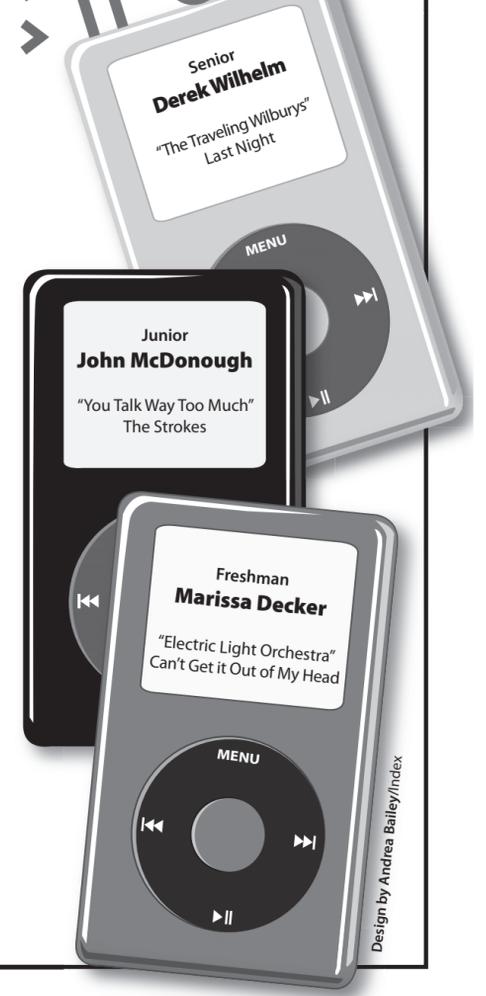
Despite its shortcomings, Colbert's book still is funny with enough decent material and shining moments that make it worth reading.

Avid Colbert fans will not be disappointed in his latest effort to author his knee-jerk reactions to various issues in "I Am America (And So Can You!)." The book fails to realize the entire Colbert persona, demonstrating that "Stephen Colbert" has his limits as a

character. Colbert simply is just not as entertaining in print as he is on television, but the personality fans have come to know and love through the show is nonetheless present.

"Copious footnotes and random thoughts litter the side of the margins, creating a sarcastic subtext similar to 'The Word' segment on the show, though not always as poignant or funny."

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