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College Music Roundup features bands that focus on a Catholic-school fear of sex, vintage sounds and some hard soul.

Honeybears gains spotlight

BY HARRY BURSON
Reviewer

Tim Kasher is one unhappy dude. As the frontman for Cursive — that emo band who made it big with their 2003 concept album “The Ugly Organ” — Kasher has mined his inner angst for all its worth, amassing a large and devoted fan base.

Cursive leapt ahead of their emo peers on “The Ugly Organ” thanks to its (groan) Felliniesque concept: Kasher wrote an emotional, confessional concept album about how hard it is to write an emotional, confessional concept album. A cute concept executed well, thanks in large part to the interesting textures provided by a since-departed cellist. The lyrics were typically angst-ridden and at times embarrassingly sophomoric with a Catholic-school fear of sex.

Three years later, Cursive released “Happy Hollow,” an album devoted to attacking suburbia and organized religion. I’m sure it was a big hit with alt high-school students.

Now, Cursive is back with their latest studio album, “Mama, I’m Swollen,” marking the second time in three albums that Kasher has come up with a phallic CD title.

Glancing at the song titles will give you some idea of the disc’s themes:

“From the Hips,” “Caveman,” “We’re Going to Hell.” Kasher is stuck writing about sex as if he were still 14, obsessively writing about foreign, sinful urges that he just can’t control. Throw in some standard emo metaphors (i.e. bleeding) and another Pinocchio allusion (on “Donkeys”), and some people will start calling him the new Dylan.

A silly comparison. Kasher’s lyrics lack any subtlety, but then again, there’s nothing subtle about teenage drama. If you’re, still looking forward to your learners permit, you might relate to this album’s broad, anguished strokes. If you’re out of high school, it’s as awkward and painful as an old yearbook photo.

The band plans on releasing two albums this year, returning with this record’s counterpart, “Senior,” in the upcoming months.

“Senior” is supposed to be a dark, introspective record, meaning the one we have now is supposed to be light and fun. And it is!

Beginning as a trip-hop act, Röyksopp has turned into a more melodic, electronica group not unlike Daft Punk or Air. This album features numerous guest vocalists (Robin, Lykke Li, Karen Dreijer of the Knife) who imbue

the music with warmth and, more importantly, lyrics.

The album’s first song (and first single), “Happy Up Here,” begins with laughter before giving way to a Parliament sample. A breathy female voice sings. It’s light. It’s catchy. It’s very nice.

The album moves on to some vintage-sounding slices of synth pop (“The Girl and the Robot,” “Miss It So Much”) that alternately recall Depeche Mode, The Human League and any number of the greatest hit-makers of the ‘80s.

As a comparison to The Human League might suggest, this music is catchy and fun, but also, somewhat disposable. The melodies will pleasantly wash over you, but you might not remember much about the album when it’s done. Maybe the sunny production will have additional emotional depth once they give us the serious “Senior.” Maybe not.

Finally, we have the debut album by Black Joe Lewis and the Honeybears.

Since I reviewed this Austin garage-soul revue’s first EP in this very column, Black Joe Lewis and company have garnered some serious media attention, being cited by many as the highlight at this year’s South by Southwest

music festival.

Their new full-length “Tell ‘Em What Your Name Is!” was produced by Jim Eno of Spoon. The gritty sound is similar to the EP, and two songs reappear here.

While his band has the hard-soul sound of Otis Redding, Black Joe Lewis himself sounds more like a latter-day James Brown, usually yelling more than singing.

The strongest track here is the opener “Gunpowder,” which kick-starts the album and shows the band at their absolute best. Like Brown, most songs are little more than high-energy vamps with Black Joe occasionally veering off-key. Not always a bad thing, but it doesn’t always work as well as you’d like.

The first half of the album blazes through like a high-energy stage show before being derailed by the bizarre militaristic Delta blues of “Master Sold My Baby,” and the mostly pointless instrumental “Humpin’.”

Clearly, the Black Joe doesn’t have a huge wealth of material, as evidenced by the album’s closer, the James Brown-tribute “Please Pt. Two.”

Overall, a highly enjoyable album — I just doubt we’ll hear any more from Black Joe Lewis and the Honeybears. Sort of a shame.

Rourke creates complex feelings

BY FRANKLIN CLINE
Reviewer

“The Wrestler,” director Darren Aronofsky’s fourth movie, is the heartbreaking tale of “The Ram,” a professional wrestler, brilliantly portrayed by Mickey Rourke, coming to terms with the fact that his career — and, arguably, his life — hit its apex 20 years prior.

Sounds really, really sad, right? Well, it is. “The Wrestler” is one of the most emotionally devastating films I have seen in recent memory. I went to see it knowing that it probably would have its down moments but not realizing that pretty much the whole film was going to be one long requiem of sorts. Aronofsky is probably best known for directing “Requiem For A Dream,” a brilliant movie, which has received an annoying amount of cult hype since its release eight years ago. Despite the fact that it is somewhat like “Fight Club” in its frustratingly simple and mostly one-dimensional approach to incredibly complex topics, “Requiem” might be the saddest film I’ve ever seen.

Don’t bother renting “The Wrestler” if you’re in the mood for a feel-good film. Go on Hulu and stream “The Hollywood Knights” or rent “Vicky Christina Barcelona” instead. No, this film is seriously depressing, assuming one interprets the beautifully ambiguous ending in a negative fashion.

But let’s look past the film’s somber tone and toward some perhaps more attractive elements, like Rourke’s much-heralded comeback role as Randy “The Ram” Robinson (real name: Robin Ramzinski), a down-and-out wrestler who used to be a Hulk Hogan-like superstar. For me, much of the beauty of the film comes from Rourke’s note-perfect mix of tough guy and pathetic child. I know every critic has already said it, but it really was the best performance of the year — a performance of Rourke’s caliber would warrant a viewing of even the most mediocre film.

Luckily for us, the art-hungry public, the script also is top-notch, lovingly crafted by Robert Siegel, former editor of the Onion, who clearly was a big fan of professional wrestling back in the day, like myself. As an old fan of wrestling, I was truly excited to see a film that would take the sport seriously and give serious due to these men who work their butts off just to entertain a few people each night.

Really, that was the best part of the film for me. I know this probably won’t speak to the majority of readers, but it was refreshing to see a film that so precisely nailed the intricacies of the sport.

On one hand, the film is very silly, homoerotic and racist. This is seen in the feud between Ram and the Ayatollah, a play on the real-life “Iron Sheik,” who reached the height of his career as a heel — a bad guy, in wrestling vocabulary — during the initial Desert Storm invasion.

On the other hand, it’s full of mostly-good, talented guys who perform night after night, hoping for a big break that might never come or has come and gone. The film almost made me want to start watching wrestling again, but then I realized that the most interesting part of professional wrestling rarely is what actually takes place in the ring. That’s precisely what this film intends to remind the viewer.

Monsters earn top dollar for film

BY TYLER GEORGE
Reviewer

From directors Conrad Vernon and Rob Letterman comes the latest DreamWorks animated feature, “Monsters vs. Aliens.” Vernon and Letterman directed other DreamWorks films such as the “Shrek” series, the “Madagascar” series and “Shrek Tale,” so I think they had a pretty good idea of how to pull off another great animated flick.

Taking the top spot at the box office, “Monsters vs Aliens,” with its star-studded cast, has been wowing audiences of all ages for a week now and in 3-D! That’s right, folks. This movie is shown in 3-D, which means for a couple extra bucks (\$7.75 per ticket) you can get a pair of sweet glasses and enjoy the film as things appear to jump out of the screen at you.

Aside from the movie being in 3-D, the cast list is also amazing. With names like Reese Witherspoon, Hugh Laurie, Seth Rogen, Kiefer Sutherland, Stephen Colbert and “The Office” stars Rainn Wilson and John Krasinski, I was impressed by the movie before I even entered the theater.

The movie tells the story of Susan Murphy (Witherspoon), who is struck by a meteor (and miraculously survives, but we won’t address the improbability of that) on her wedding day. After walking down the aisle to join her groom, she rapidly grows to the size of the Statue of Liberty. Government officials arrive on the spot, almost as if they were expecting this to happen and apprehend her. She is

taken to a secret government location where other monsters are kept in captivity. There she meets B.O.B. (Rogen), Dr. Cockroach, Ph.D. (Laurie), The Missing Link (Will Arnett) and Insectosaurus. Suddenly, aliens invade the planet, led by head honcho Gallaxhar (Wilson). General W.R. Monger (Sutherland) proposes to the President of the United States (Colbert) that the monsters fend off the aliens. Now it’s up to Susan and her friends to save the world from its terrible, alien-ridden plight.

It’s hard to give an outstanding acting award because there wasn’t really acting, per se. I am, however, still going to give one because some of the voice jobs were really awesome. I’d especially like to draw attention to the voice of Gallaxhar, Rainn Wilson, or, as some of you might better know him, Dwight K. Schrute, assistant to the regional manager. As a huge fan of “The Office,” it was fun to hear his voice outside of that environment.

He did a very good job as Gallaxhar, and his vocal inflection really reminded me of Robin Williams’ job as the Genie in the 1992 movie “Aladdin.” He seemed to be really into it, not that the other actors weren’t, but he just went above and beyond, which is why he earned this award.

Like a lot of other DreamWorks animations, the movie was rated PG for crude humor.

Although some people might argue that such humor is not necessary, I would say it is, solely because it helps attract an older audience to the film and allows it to make more money. How else could the producers expect this movie to make any money at a theater in a small college town? It is because of this humor that Truman students, or just college kids in general, would even entertain the thought of seeing this movie. Without this clever blend of animation that appeals to the kids and humor that is directed toward their parents, I don’t think these types of movies would be nearly as successful as they are.

Something that caught my attention in the movie was that the monsters were all portrayed as innocent victims of The Man. They had mostly been victims of experiments gone awry and had been taken into government control before they really did anything wrong. It reminded me of the 2001 Disney/Pixar production “Monsters, Inc.” in its portrayal of monsters as misunderstood creatures who really don’t mean anybody any harm. In this way the movie also appeals to children because it doesn’t portray the monsters as big, scary beings that are going to eat you, but instead as funny, friendly creatures.

Overall, this movie was definitely a big hit for DreamWorks, and it was definitely a big hit for the kids. If you like animations, I would highly recommend seeing it.

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