



Photo courtesy of Warner Bros.

Clint Eastwood appears as a Korean War veteran in "Gran Torino" amid a cast of young unknown actors.

Eastwood rides again

Actor and director Clint Eastwood shows he still has it in "Gran Torino"

BY TYLER GEORGE
Reviewer

"Gran Torino," the latest product of director and esteemed actor Clint Eastwood, is a heartfelt story of Korean War veteran Walt Kowalski. Kowalski, portrayed by Eastwood himself, is a stereotypically mean old man who wants nothing more than to be left alone on his porch with his dog and a Pabst. When a family of the Hmong culture moves in next door, Kowalski's quiet environment is disturbed as gang hate soon ensues. Despite his bias, Kowalski takes it upon himself to help the family, and apparently this is one of the many formulas that creates a good movie.

Okay, time to give my outstanding acting award. As always, Eastwood plays a pivotal role in the film, and his acting was outstanding. I'm not so sure that anyone else could have played the role of hardened war vet Kowalski. Eastwood is phenomenal, and any other actor who might want to attempt to play one of his roles has huge shoes to fill. Which is why, to everyone's mock surprise, I'm giving my award to him.

Going into the film, I was not sure how the acting would be, considering

it was more or less Eastwood featured in a film with a bunch of no-name actors. I was surprised. We all knew that Eastwood would be awesome, so let's move on. Others may argue, but I also would like to shed a little bit of light on the younger actors of this gem. First off is Bee Vang, who plays the role of Thao Vang Lor. When we meet Thao, he's a pathetic little shrimp taking orders from his older sister and spending most of his time doing 'women's work.' By the end of the film, Thao changes into a completely different character. This really shows an actor's dynamics, or ability to play different roles, which, in my opinion, is the true measure of a good actor. Another young person I would like to draw attention to is Ahney Her, who acts as Sue Lor, Thao's older sister. Throughout the film, Sue almost plays a maternal role to Thao. Sue is forced to mature at a young age because her mother can't speak English, so she has to be the head of the household. Her did a great job playing this role, acting as a concerned sister and persistent neighbor to the extremely unfriendly 'Wally' Kowalski.

Unlike the three previous actors, I was disappointed by the performance of Christopher Carley, who plays the role of a young priest, Father Janovich. His acting simply did not impress me. His lines seemed premeditated, and it appeared as if he was more or less go-

ing through the motions. Many things make a good actor, and to me, two of these things are critical. One, character dynamics and flexibility, has already been discussed above. The other is how well the person plays the role. For example, when I saw Eastwood in this film, I didn't think, "Oh, look! There's Clint Eastwood playing some old war vet!" I thought, "That's Walt Kowalski." When I saw Carley, however, I saw a young actor attempting to pull off the role of a Catholic priest. I saw him as an actor in the movie, not as a fully developed character.

Lastly, before you see this release, something to keep in mind is the fact that it's very real, to an extent that is, at some points, sickening. It illustrates gang hate at its worst and doesn't let up for a second. The movie keeps the audience more than busy for every second of its 116-minute runtime, and not a dry eye was left in the house at the end of this remarkable story.

I'll be honest. When I first saw the preview for this flick, I was pretty skeptical. I mean, Eastwood is reaching a ripe old age now (he'll be 79 this May), and I wasn't sure if he could pull off the tough guy role again. I wondered if he still had it in him. Take my word for it: I never should have doubted him. He's still got it.

Mashup artist relies on laptop and dancing

BY JEREMY HELLWIG
Reviewer

Gregg Gillis, a former biomedical engineering student from Pittsburgh, Penn., sprinted onto the stage at the Pageant in St. Louis Thursday Jan. 8. But Gillis (aka Girl Talk) did not sing, play an instrument or even provide background vocals — all he needed was a laptop.

Right now, Girl Talk probably is the nation's most well-known mashup artist. By mashup, I mean his music is comprised almost entirely of samples from other artists' songs. In fact, his latest album, "Feed the Animals," contains 322 samples from more than 200 artists. Gillis admits he doesn't even own half the music he uses to make albums. Understandably then, his music draws a decent amount of controversy, although I do not think there have been any lawsuits ... yet.

During performances, Gillis often strips down to his underwear and dances behind his laptop, surrounded by fans. To protect his laptop from all the sweat that pours off him during shows, he covers it with shrink wrap and packing tape. I don't exactly know what he does on the laptop during his live shows, other than the fact that he never stops dancing the entire time.

Girl Talk's performance was preceded by two opening acts. The first act featured a rap artist who had pretty good beats but didn't know how to enunciate, which makes him a bad rapper in my opinion. The next act was an eccentric rap duo called

Grand Buffet. After a few songs about their hatred of micro-waves, their love of expletives and their "cream cheese money," the crowd seemed to have grown pretty bored.

When Girl Talk finally came on stage, the crowd went nuts. He played a lot of his well known mixes, but it seemed like he did a lot of improvising and remixing. Otherwise, there wouldn't have been any reason for Gillis to be there. As soon as he came on stage, the crew let a crowd of fans onto the stage. Their antics provided a lot of amusement to the rest of the audience for the remainder of the show.

"During performances, Gillis often strips down to his underwear and dances behind his laptop, surrounded by fans."

Obviously, Girl Talk makes dance music. Because of this, I decided to stand in the pit, where I assumed dancing would occur. It turns out that kids these days "dance" by pushing and shoving until they are really close to the stage, then almost get

crushed by other people doing the same thing, then push back in the other direction to get some air. If there was a band on the stage, then it would make sense to try to get close to the stage. I don't understand the draw of wanting to be slightly closer to a sweaty white kid with a laptop, especially considering the music is coming from the speakers, not the stage. I went to the bathroom and noticed the people in the bar area were dancing and having lots of fun. I guess it's a generational thing, considering most of the obnoxious people in the pit looked like little kids to me. Maybe I'm just getting older ... but I prefer to think that kids are getting dumber.

Common's summer jams get wintery reception

BY HARRY BURSON
Reviewer

Suddenly 2008 was a historic year and Common had it all wrong.

Back in June the album might have made more sense. The disc was supposed to be called "Invincible Summer" and would come out at the end of the month. How was he supposed to know that by the time the album finally saw the light of day at the end of December, it would be a hopelessly archaic artifact?

In the six months from June to December, our nation began to feel the effects of the worst recession in decades and elected a black president. Anyone expecting Common's take on the current state of the country has to make do with his new album, "Universal Mind Control," boasting songs with titles like "Sex 4 Suga." It's kind of a let down.

OK, that's a little unfair. As Bob Dylan has shown us, we can't expect an artist to write solely relevant songs. Still, the timing of this record is terrible — it's just jarring to hear Common's mindless party jams at this particular moment in history.

So, let's approach the album out of context. If we had heard it back in June, how would it have sounded? Not that good, it turns out. As one of the few socially conscious rappers who has managed to break



Photo courtesy of Maroon5.com

Maroon 5's new album remixes top 40 stalwarts to create a lackluster blend.

into the mainstream (thanks to the grace and benevolence of fellow Chicago-native, Kanye West), Common's frivolity seems forced. The Neptunes, who produced the majority of the disc, turn in some decent Afrika Bambaata-style old school beats, but Common sounds bored and out of place with come-ons like "Punch Drunk Love" (featuring West) and the title track.

Common is working on a new album for 2009. Forget about "Universal Mind Control" — I'm sure he'll come through on the next one.

Next up in this week's roundup, we have Maroon 5's recent remix disc, "Call and Response: The Remix

Album."

The CD features a wide array of artists and producers monkeying around with the band's music, from Top 40 stalwarts like The Neptunes and Swizz Beatz to indie-darlings like Deerhoof and Of Montreal.

As you might imagine, such a diverse range of artists makes the album a little uneven. Like all remix albums, the primary problem is putting a fresh spin on well-worn songs without compromising what made the tracks good to begin with. And like most remix albums, only some of the remixes are successful.

Maroon 5 is very much into meticulous studio craft, and in most

cases the original version clearly is better conceived and executed than the remix. The Mark Ronson remix of "Wake Up Call" featuring Mary J. Blige predictably sounds like reheated Amy Winehouse. Elsewhere, Paul Oakenfold, The Neptunes and Swizz Beatz phone in some lackluster remixes, while Of Montreal and Cut Copy make major mistakes in trying to radically reinterpret Maroon 5's material.

The best remixes were a surprisingly mellow version of "Goodnight Goodnight" by Deerhoof and a feisty refashioning of "Little of Your Time" by Bloodshy & Avant, the guys responsible for Britney Spears' "Toxic." There are some interesting juxtapositions, but mostly "Call and Response" makes me want to get out my copy of Maroon 5's "It Won't Be Soon Before Long."

Finally, we have Rivers Cuomo's second disc of unreleased demos, "Alone II: The Home Recordings of Rivers Cuomo."

Fresh on the heels of Weezer's "Red Album," I still can't figure out why this disc was released if not purely to capitalize on Christmas sales. Regardless of motives, I'm glad to have this disc to rinse out the bad taste of the "Red Album."

Like the first "Alone" compilation, this collection scours Cuomo's home demos from 2008 all the way back to his pre-Weezer days. The odd tracks (stabs at classical music like "Victory on the Hill" and tape loop experiments like "Harvard Blues") sit right alongside potential Weezer songs ("I Want to Take You Home Tonight" and "My Brain is Working Overtime").

There are some exhilarating novelties in a cover of the Beach Boys' "Don't Worry Baby" and a failed Jermaine Dupri collaboration called "Can't Stop Partying," but for me, the highlight of the album is the extensive liner notes, written by Cuomo himself.

In the notes, he explains the origins of each song while candidly discussing his feelings toward Weezer's discography (he's come to terms with "Pinkerton" and is ambivalent toward "The Green Album").

If you enjoy Weezer, or simply want to look into the mind of the craziest pop auteur since Brian Wilson, this disc definitely is worth your time.

Next week I'll take a look at the latest from Animal Collective and A.C. Newman, plus a live disc from French electronica outfit Justice.

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