

"Quantum" lacks classic ambience



Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures
Daniel Craig reprises his role as the blue-eyed Bond in the spy series' 22nd installment, "Quantum of Solace," released Nov. 14.

BY TYLER GEORGE
Reviewer

Director Marc Forster got his start directing films such as "The Kite Runner," "Stranger Than Fiction" and "Finding Neverland," and his new addition to the long line of James Bond films, "Quantum of Solace," left me with my mouth hanging wide open.

In "Quantum of Solace," Daniel Craig continues his role as MI6 agent 007. Judi Dench reappears as M, and Jeffrey Wright also is in the new release, continuing his role as FBI agent Felix. The last of the "Casino Royale" cast to make it into "Quantum" is none other than Giancarlo Giannini who plays Mathis. New face Olga Kurylenko plays the latest Bond girl, Camille. Mathieu Amalric appears in "Quantum" as villain Dominic Greene, a power-hungry man who cares for nothing but money and the Bond girl, who somehow always is in on his devious plot.

Like previous installments, the movie begins with flashy credits, coupled with a title song composed and performed as a collaboration between Alicia Keys and Jack White. The team reportedly worked for more than two years on the song, — longer than it has taken any other Bond song to be produced. Though classic, the credits don't keep up with their predecessors. It was a neat sequence, but usually during the song, the viewer can't tell who the figure is with the gun (obviously Bond, but what actor?), whereas in this one, the character clearly is Daniel Craig. Overall, I was unimpressed with

the amount of creativity in the credits sequence.

As the 22nd installment in the 007 James Bond series, the film begins with an impressive car chase with speeds exceeding 160 mph. The chase races through the streets of Italy, and from the vantage point of Bond's Aston Martin's exhaust pipe, the audience catches a quick glimpse of the beautiful Italian countryside.

Any Bond movie typically comes with a complicated plot that makes it hard to tell what side each character is on. In this respect "Quantum" did pull through. The movie contained deception and plot twists that made it legitimately difficult to determine who exactly the audience should be rooting for.

Although "Quantum" stayed true to other Bond films in some respects, there were times when it simply didn't deliver. If you go to see a Bond movie, you can expect two things: Bond will introduce himself as, "Bond, James Bond," and at some point during the movie, 007 will ask for a "martini — shaken, not stirred." Neither of these lines found itself in the script for "Quantum of Solace." Why, you may ask? Producers and writers try to pass it off as being too early in the Bond series ("Casino Royale" is supposed to be the first Bond movie,

before "Dr. No" and "Her Majesty's Secret Service," and "Quantum of Solace" is the second). This argument is countered by one simple fact: James Bond said both lines in the last Bond release, "Casino Royale."

This Bond movie explored a concept others have not, and that is any reference to another Bond movie. A lot of "Quantum" had to do with Bond seeking revenge for

the loss of his love, Vesper, who died shortly after betraying him in "Casino Royale." Although this added a lot of pre-existing drama and tension to the movie, no other Bond movie specifically has referenced another Bond movie. I'm not saying I don't like change, but I expected "Quantum" to stick to the classic Bond precursors. My outstanding acting award goes

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to new Bond girl Olga Kurylenko. Also bent on revenge, Olga plays Camille, a fearless, emotional girl who is eager to join Bond in his endeavors and get payback. She executes the role very convincingly and looks like a pro among seasoned vets Craig and Dench.

Overall, I give the movie an 8.5 out of 10. It was a great movie, but only one thing was wrong with it: The fact of the matter is that it is a Bond movie, and labeled as such, it needs to stick to the guidelines.

Dylan recycles music, Megapuss loses reality

BY HARRY BURSON
Reviewer

What's the deal with the elderly taking over College Music Roundup? Last week featured Lou Reed and now Bob Dylan. Shouldn't we be focusing more on all the great new music young people are making instead of needlessly celebrating these oft-commended canonical figures?

Probably, but I'm an old fuddy-duddy, so Dylan it is. (Don't worry young'uns, we've also got Devendra Banhart's new group Megapuss rounding out the Roundup this week.)

Bob Dylan's new compilation, "Tell Tale Signs," is the eighth installment in his official Bootleg Series. It's been receiving unanimously positive notices from critics since its release in October. How could it possibly live up to the hype?

The Bootleg Series began in 1991 with three discs of rarities and outtakes spanning his career up until then. The series is chronologically ordered, and the final disc of Dylan's most recent material clearly was the weakest.

Accordingly, I was a little apprehensive about the newest entry in the series, especially because many of the tracks were culled from the sessions from his spotty 1989 "Oh Mercy" album.

Also slightly troublesome: Many of the tracks are live or alternate versions of previously released songs. Sure, Dylan is famous for his ability to reinterpret and modify his own work, but there is something a little disappointing about paying money for new versions of so many familiar tunes.

Fortunately, the collection does not disappoint. "Tell Tale Signs" is available as a single-

double- and triple-disc set. The two-disc version is the likeliest edition to find at most retailers, as the three-disc set seems to be designed for Dylan freaks only, selling for more than \$100. I don't have that kind of cash, so we'll focus on the standard double disc.

Unlike the first three entries in the Bootleg Series, this set is not arranged chronologically, organized instead for listening ease.

Both discs begin with markedly different versions of "Mississippi" recorded in 1996.

Although the song officially appeared five years later on "Love and Theft," the outtakes here are as good, if not better.

That is what makes this collection persistently great. Other artists' scraps usually are half-baked messes, but Dylan seems to be incapable of doing any wrong.

Excellent soundtrack tunes ("Cross the Green Mountain") sit beside revelatory covers ("32-20 Blues") and incendiary live tracks ("Ring Them Bells"). The tracks are expertly arranged, making this as listenable and perhaps as downright enjoyable as Dylan's latest studio albums.

Dylan enthusiasts undoubtedly already own "Tell Tale Signs," but there is enough quality material here to captivate even casual fans.

Next, we've got Megapuss with its debut record, "Surfing." Megapuss is a new project featuring noted freak-folkie Devendra Banhart and his buddy Greg Rogove.

Banhart has garnered some attention over the past few years with his unique lo-fi psychedelic folk recordings ("folk" meaning that his primary accompaniment is his lone acoustic guitar, not that he is in any way involved with American roots music — His sound is more of a freaky kaleidoscope of various strands of

"On the cover two naked, bearded men (Banhart and Rogove) dramatically engage in a knife-fight, text artfully covering their naughty bits."



Photo courtesy of Young God Records and Sebastian Mlynarski
Folk artist Devendra Banhart (pictured) partnered with Greg Rogove to form Megapuss, a conceptual pairing that released the album "Surfing" this week.

world music). Since his 2005 album "Cripple Crow," Banhart has expanded his sound with more electric instruments finding their way into his albums, dominating the proceedings on this new Megapuss record.

Before we get to the music, I should note Megapuss is a fairly conceptual group, something like an inside joke between friends. Banhart and Rogove started the band by coming up with an album's worth of song titles without considering words or music. Eventually they sat down and wrote these songs and, voilà, "Surfing."

As the concept might imply, this is a very silly album. On the cover two naked, bearded men (Banhart and Rogove) dramatically engage in a knife-fight, text artfully covering their naughty bits. The photograph seems silly and shocking, but after listening to the record, I can honestly say it is perhaps one of the most appropriate album covers in recent memory.

Megapuss' songs are bizarre stream-of-consciousness exercises in absurdity. Beginning with the funky, innocuous "Crop Circle Jerk '94" the album takes a turn for the weird

quickly with "Duck People Duck Man," a spoken-word entreaty for tolerance from a duck creature or something.

Then there is the equally nonsensical "Hamman," about some man who is either made of or in love with ham. There is also the gleefully profane "A Gun on His Hip and a Rose on His Chest" on which Megapuss curses George Bush and Enron before giving props to Bo Diddley.

Additionally there are meandering acoustic numbers like "Sayulita" that wouldn't sound out of place on one of Banhart's albums.

I suspect I may have lost you by now, that you may think this all sounds a bit too silly or way too stupid. Amazingly, it isn't.

Bolstered by lo-fi production and a tossed-off feel, this album is surprisingly enjoyable. The Beeheart-like absurdity doesn't become annoying, thanks to the abundance of hooks that keep the record buoyant.

His record isn't important, but it is fun and catchy like more rock should be. Not essential, but a fun way to waste 45 minutes.

Next time on the College Music Roundup we've got New Orleans rappers the Knux plus more. Until then, happy listening.

Eccentric Flaming Lips Christmas flick tanks

BY JEREMY HELLWIG
Reviewer

Last week on Armistice Day, the Flaming Lips finally released its much-anticipated film, "Christmas on Mars." The band is, unfortunately, known more for its eccentricity than for its music, and this film is not doing much to help. "Christmas on Mars" was written and directed by Lips front man Wayne Coyne and features all of the band members as actors. It went into production in 2001, and I first heard about it in 2004. It was supposed to come out by Christmas 2005, but for some reason did not come out until Armistice Day 2008. I don't know exactly why it took seven years to make an 86-minute movie, but my best guess is that they were stalling because they weren't sure whether or not they actually should release such a piece of crap.

The story is about the first Christmas on a newly colonized Mars. Major Syrtis, played by multi-instrumentalist, arranger and composer Steven Drozd, is trying to put on a Christmas pageant to

celebrate the first human child born on the planet. The oxygen machine breaks, and the gravity is messed up somehow. As a result, a bunch of the crew members begin having psychotic episodes and hallucinating. Major Syrtis, specifically, sees the unborn baby dying in strange and disturbing places. At some point, the man who was supposed to play Santa in the pageant kills himself, and Syrtis must find a replacement. Then Wayne Coyne, the director and writer of the film, shows up as a silent green alien.

The theme of the film is that, apparently, humans aren't meant to live in space. This line is stated at least five times. The dialogue never explains exactly why. Apparently, based on interviews with Coyne, it has to do with the isolation and the bleak scenery and different oxygen and gravity, but none of that is actually given as reason for why man should not live in space.

The biggest problem is that the writing is stupid and stilted. Way too much time is taken up by the characters repeating the same thing back and forth to one another. In one in-

stance, it felt like five minutes went by while some characters repeatedly verified to one another whether or not a man in a Santa suit just ran out door number one.

Also, a bunch of the characters don't really make any sense. The guy who apparently is in charge of the space station acts too much like the angry sergeant from "Full Metal Jacket." He yells and curses at everyone, making fun of them and generally expressing unfounded anger. This just eats up time and makes the audience wince at his vulgarity. I have no problem with cursing, but nothing ruins a film quite as easily as out-of-place vulgarity that doesn't fit the mood or situation. Really, none of the characters, other than maybe Major Syrtis, ever fit the mood of the

film. Almost every time a character says or does anything, it seems out of place. This would be quite an accomplishment, if it were done on purpose and created any kind of enjoyment, but mostly it just makes

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it clear that the filmmakers don't know what they're doing.

A number of the characters also do that annoying thing that sometimes happens in movies where they just stare at each other for a long time rather than answering a question asked of them. People don't do that in real life, so I don't know why people do it in movies. Maybe it was just really bad editing. Either way, I didn't like it.

Another problem with the film is that the audience usually doesn't really know what is going on. I didn't know until the end that the

baby had not been born yet. This is because the film takes place in some kind of strange future in which children are born from machines attached to their mothers, rather than from their mothers' bodies. I know, it's weird.

After finishing the movie, I just want to check out "Solaris" from the library. I'm talking about the original Tarkovsky film, not the remake with George Clooney. Like "Christmas on Mars," "Solaris" is about a space mission crew suffering from hallucinations. However, unlike "Christmas on Mars," "Solaris" is based on an award-winning novel and adapted by a real screenwriter. I haven't seen it, but this movie made me really want to watch someone do this concept well.

Band movies are just a bad idea. The director of Pink Floyd's cinematic version of "The Wall," Alan Parker, referred to the project as "the most expensive student film ever." Apparently "Head" was pretty good, but it was made by the Monkees, and they had their own television show for years.

Grade: F-minus-and-a-half.