

Brothers display pop potential

BY HARRY BURSON
Reviewer

OK, let's assume you appreciate pop music on a completely aesthetic level. Devoid of context, you can appreciate a good song for a good song, whether it be by, say, The Beatles, The Pixies or Rihanna.

Alright, got it? Now no complaints for considering the Jonas Brothers. There are numerous worthwhile bubblegum bands in the annals of popular music. Writing off the Jonas Brothers for their association with Disney's current stable of tween superstars would be a mistake. Perhaps they've got something going on — Rolling Stone magazine seemed to think so at least.

If you're not 12 years old or if you never watch the Disney Channel or listen to Radio Disney, it's likely you hadn't heard of the Jonas Brothers before the last couple months. Recently, the band successfully made the crossover from Disney to MTV (increasing their fans' median age from 12 to 14), following in the footsteps of Hillary Duff and (to a lesser extent) Miley Cyrus.

The group includes 19-year-old hottie Joe on vocals, 15-year-old cutie Nick on guitar and vocals and 20-year-old Kevin as the not-as-talented-or-as-cute older brother. The band formed around Nick, who is the primary songwriter and most accomplished musician.

Nick performed on Broadway as a child before releasing a solo Christian album in 2004. The album went nowhere, and apparently some suit wisely thought a brother act would do better. Voila! The Jonas Brothers. Their first album was quietly released

in 2006, then re-released in 2007 by Disney subsidiary Hollywood Records, featuring a new cover with the boys in suits and getting heavy rotation on Radio Disney.

Now the Jonas Brothers return with their second album of guitar pop, making a bid for credibility and mainstream acceptance. It seems to have worked — their Facebook page astutely touts them as a pop culture phenomenon.

So what about the music?

The Jonas Brothers are very self-consciously a rock band. They borrow the basic philosophy of grunge: playing guitar and writing your own music makes you a more sincere artist than the riffraff of the pop world who perform songs written by other people and — gasp! — don't even play their own instruments.

As such, the group bases its sound in fuzzy guitars and ironically borrows liberally from classic rock 'n' roll.

Take, for instance, their first single, "Burnin' Up." With lyrics that sound like a G-rated, vanilla rewrite of early rock innuendo (think Jerry Lee Lewis's "Great Balls of Fire"), the song describes a teenage boy's

sexual longing after a vixen in high heels and a red dress.

Except maybe it doesn't. The lyrics — lest we forget written by a 15-year-old — are sophomorically vague: "I'm slipping into the lava/ I'm trying to keep from going under." In the rock context that boys are striving for, it's impossible to imagine this song being about anything other than sex, although it's equally impossible to imagine Nick Jonas or his legions of prepubescent fans ever acknowledging it.

The album is as frustrated and repressed

"The album is as frustrated and repressed as the Jonas Brothers' famous promise rings would suggest. The shiny production doesn't help either."



Photo courtesy of JonasBrothers.com
From left to right, 15-year-old Nick, 18-year-old Joe and 20-year-old Kevin Jonas. The brothers CD, "A Little Bit Longer," was No. 4 on the Billboard 200 on Monday.

as the Jonas Brothers' famous promise rings would suggest. The shiny production doesn't help either. Sounding more akin to Avril Lavigne than Cheap Trick, the album is hopelessly indebted to the fake-rock boom from the beginning of the decade. Remember when Pink ditched sassy R&B for sassy Linda Perry-produced rock? That's what this album sounds like.

The album is slick and somewhat enjoyable, with only slightly fewer hooks and less sex than *NSYNC or Britney at their prime.

It would be nice if a band as popular as the Jonas Brothers really was the new standard-bearer of power pop, and it's not hard to imagine Nick Jonas doing something worthwhile in the future. Until then, the JoBros are just another boy band.



music review

album **"A Little Bit Longer"**

artist **The Jonas Brothers**

label **Daylight Records**

release date **August 12, 2008**

rating **★★★★☆**

Vampire series finale fails to satisfy fans



Photo courtesy of Hachette Book Group

BY CHRIS BONING
Reviewer

So this is what "Breaking Dawn," the much-ballyhooed fourth and final installment of Stephenie Meyer's "Twilight" series, comes down to: a child of biologically impossible origin and an anti-climatic ending.

In this book, released in early August, young lovers Edward Cullen and Bella Swan are married at last. The newlyweds go on their honeymoon, Edward comes through on his promise of turning Bella into a vampire and they live happily ever after — or not.

They do go on their honeymoon, and Bella does become a vampire, but not before she becomes pregnant and pops out a — there's no way around it — creepy, half-vampire, half-human (A hampire? A halfpire?) child christened with the ridiculous name of Renesmee. Meyer then devotes the rest of the novel to various characters cooing over how amazing Renesmee is and debating how to protect her from the Volturi, a sort of secret police for the vampires in the "Twilight" universe. The Volturi apparently aren't that cool with vampire-like children. There's a token showdown with the Volturi that's ultimately resolved with a

somewhat predictable stroke of the ol' deus ex machina.

"Breaking Dawn" would have been an excellent novel — there is some solid material here — if it were about 300 to 400 pages shorter (It weighs in at more than 750 pages) and if Meyer hadn't employed plot devices that, quite frankly, insult the intelligence of even the most vapid reader of her young-adult demographic.

First, there is the genesis of Renesmee. Aficionados of vampire literature and even most children probably would agree that a vampire impregnating a human is rather preposterous. Not to get into too much detail, but in one of the earlier books one of the Cullens makes a point of saying that vampires don't exactly have bodily fluids, including one necessary for procreation.

In the "Frequently Asked Questions" section of her Web site, Meyer offers a lengthy explanation for how a human-vampire hybrid is possible, which is all the more amusing and suspicious because just a few questions earlier is an inquiry about the parentage of a minor character. Meyer's response: "I don't know."

Then, there is Jacob's past drama with Bella, which is tidily resolved with Jacob imprinting on Renesmee,

meaning the two of them are henceforth connected to each other for all time. Meyer created the perplexing and questionable circumstances of someone who was once madly and obnoxiously in love with Bella falling in love with her precocious hybrid child and thereby becoming a part of her extended family forever, and she missed a huge opportunity here.

A subplot of the novels had been the alienation of a second-tier character, Leah Clearwater, who was separated from the resident pack of werewolves. Jacob's angst from losing Bella to Edward and Leah's loneliness would have dovetailed nicely, but Leah just ends up being cast aside in terms of character development.

Also, Meyer missed out on effectively conveying Bella's transformation into a vampire. Far too few pages are devoted to it, which is disappointing because most readers probably had been expecting quite a bit describing what is arguably one of the pinnacles of the series. In addition to the characters cooing over Renesmee, who initially evoked the descriptions of Lord Voldemort sans a body — essentially, a sinister infant — the characters also coo over how well Bella takes to being a vampire.

In the end, Meyer squandered several opportunities for real, deep storytelling and character development. Meyer has demonstrated that she is imaginative to some extent, but now she needs to acquire the gift of brevity. Then maybe she can become one of the promising young authors she is so often lauded as being.

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