

“Basterds” evokes blood, laughs

BY ANDY MOORE
Reviewer

Calling “Inglourious Basterds” a historical film would be a huge mistake, but having Quentin Tarantino’s name attached to it should clear that up. Tarantino never fails to offer the right amount of shock and awe for his audience.

So never mind the brutal realism of “Saving Private Ryan,” if that’s what you were expecting, because “Inglourious Basterds” might be the World War II movie to end all World War II movies.

Every Quentin Tarantino movie has one trait in common: It is not intended for a squeamish audience (You’ve been warned!). Even with its excessive and — dare I say it — pornographic violence, the film still makes a crowded theater cackle.

During opening night in Kirksville, I noticed that I’ve never seen an audience give a more disgusted shriek followed by intense laughter a minute later. Perhaps that’s because the only other Tarantino movie I saw in theaters was “Death Proof” back in 2007, and the seats were mostly empty. If I had been old enough to see “Pulp Fiction” in theaters, or if I hadn’t been too busy to see both volumes of “Kill Bill”

when they were released, I might have seen a similar reaction.

“Inglourious Basterds” follows a group of Jewish-American soldiers from the Office of Strategic Services (the OSS, the precursor to the CIA) who are ordered to drop into France and disguise themselves as civilians. These men, of course, call themselves the Basterds. Still, no one says the premise of the movie better than 1st Lieutenant Aldo Raine, aka Aldo the Apache (a perfect role for Brad Pitt): “We’re gonna be doin’ one thing and one thing only: killin’ Nazis.” And there you have it—the premise of “Inglourious Basterds” speaks for itself.

“Each and every man under my command owes me one hundred Nazi scalps, and I want my scalps,” Pitt says in the film. A little film trivia: This is not the first time Pitt scalps a German soldier, and those of you who have seen the 1994 film “Legends of the Fall” know what I’m talking about. In that respect, Pitt has the opportunity to make fun of himself in an older role.

In a parallel plot line, the movie is also about a young Jewish-French woman named Shosanna (Mélanie Laurent) whose family is killed by Colonel Hans Landa (Christoph Waltz), known in Germany and France by the name “Jew Hunter.”

Pitt’s acting career, I must say, has gone from typical pretty-boy (for films such as “Interview with the Vampire” and “Legends of the Fall”) to country-bumpkin, as he provides much of the comic relief for this film. “We ain’t in the prisoner-takin’ business. We in the killin’ Nazi business, and business is booming,” he says once again as he sums up the premise for the movie. Perhaps the best example of his humor is the scene in which he impersonates an Italian, but the only Italian word he knows is “grazie,” meaning “thank you.”

Mike Myers stars in a very brief and surprising cameo as British General Ed Fenech, but I can’t tell you any more than that for fear of spoiling the movie. Also, B.J. Novak from NBC’s “The Office” stars here as one of the Basterds.

Just a little more trivia: “Inglourious Basterds” should not be mistaken for the 1977 Italian film “That Bloody Armored Train,” which was released in the U.S. as “The Inglorious Bastards” (note the spelling is different). Believe me, I’ve seen someone make this mistake once and I’d hate for it to happen again — just remember this fact when the movie is finally released on DVD.



Photo provided by theinsider.com

Indie group bends the rules in new CD

BY COREY BOMMEL
Reviewer

The Arctic Monkeys defied all musical convention when they blasted onto the British music scene. Musical pioneers of the digital age, they gained popularity from music posted online on fan sites. Because of their relatively young age and the amount of popularity thrust upon them, many thought they would quickly fizzle out. With the release of their third full-length album, “Humbug,” the band proves they are here to stay, and their penchant for song writing is as fresh as ever.

Starting out as high school classmates and friends in High Green, England, the band started playing music as a hobby. They drew from such British influences as The Beatles, The Smiths, Oasis and The Clash to create their sound. The Arctic Monkeys played their first live show in 2003 and soon began to record demo CDs on a limited scale that were distributed to fans. These loyal fans copied the music to their computers and passed along the demos to friends. A group of fans eventually created a MySpace page for the band, providing the music to a much wider audience. Meanwhile, the band continued to play shows and gain popularity, eventually playing at the Reading and Leeds Festivals and getting their tracks posted on iTunes.

Unwilling to change their songs for a record producer, the band continued to play unsigned. In June 2005, however, the band signed with Domino Records, an independent label

run out of the owner’s own home. The band began to release singles under this new label, and in early 2006 they released their first album, “Whatever People Say I Am That’s What I’m Not.” The album proved an immediate success, making itself the fastest selling debut album in British music history. A month later the album was released in the U.S. market and earned itself the title of second fastest selling debut album for an indie rock artist. The band was thrust into the limelight, which brought its own set of controversies and a small lineup change.

After rampant touring and rushed EP’s, the Arctic Monkeys released their second album, “Favourite Worst Nightmare,” in April 2007. This release is where I caught wind of the band. To me the CD was loud, fast and in your face. I enjoyed it, but it didn’t stand out to me at first listen, although a handful of slower songs made the album memorable in the long run. The album performed well, charting No. 1 on the U.K. Albums Chart, and every song on the album made it on the top 200 of the UK Singles Chart. The band continued to earn critical praise and win awards, including top artist and top album in several countries worldwide.

In 2008 the band returned to writing new songs, stalling their touring schedule for over a year. “Humbug” was the culmination of this hiatus, and was released in August 2009. The 10 tracks on this third release would showcase a more mature band than seen on “Worst Nightmare,” trading fast paced for more complex songs

and even a ballad. “Humbug,” recorded in Joshua Tree, Calif., was produced by Queens of the Stone Age front man Josh Homme, a first-time producer.

“Humbug” propels the band beyond what many thought possible, with the band exploring unknown territory while still keeping the roots intact. The track lengths remain consistent with the band’s earlier releases, giving you a quick peek into the worlds they create for you but not allowing a lengthy stay. The first single, “Crying Lightning,” follows the previous traditions set by the band — loud and aggressive. If it’s the only song you have heard from the new album you might expect more of the same from “Humbug.” “Pretty Visitors” does much of the same with a full-out punk beat. On the opposite end of the spectrum is the band’s closest song to a ballad, “Cornerstone.” The song follows a lovesick man as he wanders from seedy bar to darkened pub looking for a girl who reminds him of his ex-girlfriend. I would expect this one to be the next single off the album. In between you have all manners of music, many songs drawing from late 60s and 70s Britpop musicians.

Overall, this is an album that impresses, but probably won’t be playing full rotations in your car in 10 years. The album was a step in a new direction for the band, but in the process, it possibly alienated large parts of their fan base. The band’s popularity continues to grow, and the awards continue to pile up — 24 overall to date. The Arctic Monkeys are well on their way to being one of the biggest British bands to create the widespread popularity shared by the likes of Oasis.

“Hairspray” on stage feels fabulous

BY NICK FRUMSON
Reviewer

For me, “Hairspray” isn’t just a musical, it’s a way of life, and one of the greatest pieces of entertainment. I think the movie is excellent, but it’s the Broadway show and Marc Shaiman’s music and lyrics that gave the classic John Waters musical-turned-film life.

In case you don’t know the story, “Hairspray” is about Tracy Turnblad, a big girl with a big heart who loves to dance. She wants to get onto an afternoon dance show called “The Corny Collins Show,” but is at first thwarted by the producers’ prejudices. Using her spirit and big heart, she changes everyone’s minds and integrates the show and all but breaks the status quo.

“Good Morning Baltimore” is the opening number for the show. It sets the mood, giving you a summary of what’s in store. It also replaces the traditional overture most musicals have. It is a 50s-esque “1, 2, 3, clap” song, similar to “Be My Baby” by the Ronettes. The lyrics talk about how much Tracy wants to be a star and show everyone how wonderful she is. Later in the show, the three main female roles, Tracy, Amber and Penny, all sing a song with their mothers

about how they are grown up. “Mama, I’m a Big Girl Now” is a great “do-wop” song. It sports three-part harmony and jazzy lyrics. This song and its catchy chorus are phenomenally fun.

Next is “(The Legend of) Miss Baltimore Crabs” sung by the “Corny Collins” show’s manager, Velma Von Tussle. This is one of my favorites from the show. It is a tango-like solo

number for Velma to explain her situation, her racism and her lack of openness to change or diversity. At one point she reminisces about winning Miss Baltimore Crabs by “screwing” the judges. Tracy and her mom, Edna, sing a song called “Welcome to the 60s.” This is one of the best numbers in the show. It’s

sort of a coming-out, “welcome to life” for Edna.

The stage number features a full chorus

accompaniment, lots of dancing and extravagant costume changes. The character Edna is played by a man. Originating the role of Edna was none other than the fabulous Harvey Fierstein. Who doesn’t love a little drag here and there, huh?

The finale is the longest and best number in the show. “You Can’t Stop the Beat” is an awesome way to end the show. It’s about 170 beats per minute, which really is very fast. Combined with that quick tempo are a ton of words, and almost every phrase begins with “You can’t stop” and then either “the beat” or something else, depending on whether it’s the start of a verse or the chorus. Besides the music and singing, there is a ton of dancing. While a lead character is singing a verse the chorus members are getting their groove on. The chorus has a simple but adorable repeating set of moves that mimic what they are singing.

“Hairspray” is one of the best Broadway shows around. It discusses controversial topics such as racism and body image. And if you don’t like “campy,” you learn to cope with it because the music is of high quality, and the lyrics couldn’t be more clever. Overall, it’s an adorable “get up and dance,” feel-good musical!



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