

Coheed and Cambria conclude epic with "Rainbow"



BY COREY BOMMEL
Reviewer

Progressive rock is known for its epic concept albums detailing vivid stories, and, with Coheed and Cambria's latest release, the longest completed concept album has finally come to its conclusion.

For those unfamiliar with them, Coheed and Cambria's studio albums have followed an overarching storyline. Each of the five albums has detailed "The Amory Wars," a science fiction epic penned by frontman Claudio Sanchez. The story also is published in comic book form, linking their music with the graphic images.

The latest release, "Year of the Black Rainbow," is both the beginning and the end of this massive story. "Rainbow" serves as the prequel to the storyline of "The Amory Wars." However, the music is easily accessible to listeners who

have no idea what is going on in the story. "Rainbow" branches out as a cinematic experience rather than words on a page.

The album subtracts some of the filler elements and modulation of previous releases, instead focusing on a singular notion of focused melody. The music sounds organic, without the forced feeling many concept albums produce. This also is the first album on which new drummer Chris Pennie has recorded.

"Pearl of the Stars" is a beautifully composed, acoustic-based ballad. "Here We Are Juggernaut" is the best track on the album. "Juggernaut" is an epic prog-metal anthem with a catchy melody, hammering drums, soaring vocals and riffing guitars. The chorus alone hooks the listener and won't let go, making the band's decision to release it as their first single a worthy choice. The album doesn't let up until the closer "The Black Rainbow," with its repeating calls of "It's over" echoing into silence.

This album, although simpler on many levels, does not stray far from the band's well-worn writing style. However, any fans of progressive rock will find "The Black Rainbow"

to be a fascinating album, whether or not they buy into the conceptual nature of "The Amory Wars."

MGMT

After their highly successful album "Oracular Spectacular," it was unclear if MGMT would create another album along the same lines or continue to evolve their musical talents. Fortunately the band continued to change on their follow-up album, "Congratulations."

The album cover shows a cartoon character on a surfboard being swallowed by the gaping jaws of a monster in a wave. This album swallows the listener whole from the start with its psychedelic melodies and chaotic lyrics. But despite the band's new heavy influences, the album's tone is never oppressive.

The Brooklyn-based band doesn't try to create music with a radio-friendly feel. There are no catchy hooks or sing-along choruses. They seem to be a self-deprecating band, having turned down invites to play as openers for top players in the industry and even wanted to release "Congratulations" as a free download. However, this lack of commercial influences created an album that is enjoyable to relax



Photo courtesy of last.fm

From left: Drummer Chris Pennie, lead vocalist Claudio Sanchez, lead guitarist Travis Stever and bassist Michael Todd of Coheed and Cambria.

and space out to.

The first track, "It's Working," sums up how the rest of the album sounds. Eerie strings and synths, diabolic guitars and harpsichords, throbbing bass and snappy drums all pull the track along. Add singer Andrew VanWyngarden's smooth vocals detailing how isolated surfing within the con-

finer of a wave can feel, and you have the album's overall theme of chaos and isolation. The instrumental "Lady Dada's Nightmare" starts off melancholy and free but quickly descends into terror with shrieks in the background. Even the 12-minute long "Siberian Breaks" manages to stay fresh, continuously changing styles to assault the

senses with psychedelic melodies.

With its chaotic feel and theme of isolation "Congratulations" isn't for everyone. Listeners brave enough to sit through it will find something new and exciting on each subsequent play-through as they probe the deeper meanings in the chaos.

Laughter dies in "Funeral"



BY KEN DUSOLD
Reviewer

Funerals usually are stressful and sorrowful events. It is not an occasion for comedy, unless of course the funeral is the setting for a movie. In "Death at a Funeral," a remake of a British film of the same name, director Neil LaBute tosses aside the tears and tissues in an attempt to draw laughter from his audience. Although he succeeds at times, much of the movie falls short of hilarious.

The film begins with Aaron (Chris Rock), a struggling author, somberly receiving what he believes is his father's coffin at the family residence, where the funeral ceremony is to take place. The poignant moment of a son trying to prepare for his father's final farewell quickly evaporates as it is discovered that, because of an error made by the funeral home, his father's body has been misplaced. A funeral home misplacing a body is a highly unlikely event, and if it did happen, one could assume family members would be outraged and possibly traumatized. Aaron, although upset, remarkably maintains control in this scene.

Following the mishap with the body, the film slowly introduces us to the rest of the family. There is Aaron's wife Michelle (Regina Hall), whose internal clock is nagging her to have a baby. Aaron's mother (Loretta Devine), who is joining Michelle's internal clock in nagging the couple for a grandchild and Aaron's younger brother Ryan (Martin Lawrence), who is a steamy sex novelist in New York and the pride of his entire family, much to Aaron's jealousy.

In the immediate family, only Rock and Lawrence have chemistry. Devine, who has given Emmy-worthy performances on television shows like "Grey's Anatomy," appears too coldhearted, as she apparently cares more about having a grandchild and Ryan giving the eulogy than she does about her recently deceased husband. Even her occasional crying fits are lacking in visible tears.

The film's real humor does not begin until the extended family arrives. Oscar



(James Marsden), recently engaged to Aaron and Ryan's cousin (Zoe Saldana), provides the loudest laughs after he mistakenly takes what he thinks is valium. Adopted cousin Norman (Tracy Morgan) suffers at the hands of Uncle Russell (Danny Glover), whom Norman must chauffeur to the funeral and babysit all day.

With the exception of a truly disgusting and quite unnecessary scene involving Norman assisting cantankerous Uncle Russell in the bathroom after the wheelchair-bound geezer eats something that does not agree with him, Norman's pain makes for decent comedy. He only wants to attend the funeral to give his condolences but instead gets suckered into escorting the cane-wielding old man and is subsequently asked to cover for family members as various problems arise. Do they show him any gratitude? Nope.

Morgan, who often plays obnoxious, self-centered morons like his character on NBC's "30 Rock," might be the most likable person in "Death at a Funeral."

This film has a relatively funny cast of leading and supporting actors and a plot sporting a whole lot of potential. Unfortunately, LaBute's movie moves too sluggishly for a comedy. It misses the one aspect that films like this — with dysfunction poking its head around every corner



Photos courtesy of rottentomatoes.com
"Death at a Funeral" underperforms as a comedy despite showcasing a talented cast.

— needs. That aspect is a fast-paced feeling to keep the audience laughing. Instead, there are too many moments of dry dialogue between a collection of straight men, while the few funny men in the picture try to pick up the slack to no avail. Marsden, Morgan and Glover are funny, but they are not funny enough to stop the film from bordering on boring.

LaBute heard about a hu-

morous little British comedy and, like many other filmmakers, saw the chance to transplant the story to the American screen. Sometimes this gamble works, and sometimes it does not.

LaBute deserves kudos for the effort but should not expect accolades for the result. With a few funny performers and an imaginably enjoyable script, "Death at a Funeral" could have been better.

Inferno suffices as guilty pleasure



BY ALEX CARLSON
Reviewer

Writing in the fiery pits of the abyss, damned souls are equalized by death, forever bound to their evil intentions.

The good ascend to Paradise, the evil to the Inferno. Welcome to "Dante's Inferno," a brand new action game for the Xbox 360 aiming to usurp "God of War" as the most mature and violent action game available. Is this journey through Hell worthwhile?

"Dante's Inferno," despite the name, doesn't follow the story of the legendary medieval poem, "The Divine Comedy," by Dante Alighieri. While "The Divine Comedy" follows the story of its creator's trek through Hell on a quest to discover enlightenment through God, "Dante's Inferno" takes a more action-oriented approach.

The Dante of "Dante's Inferno" is a soldier of the Crusades who, after a number of sinful acts, discovers that his love, Beatrice, has been killed and dragged to Hell by Lucifer. Dante confronts the spirit of Death, steals its weapon, and enters the Gates of Hell to rescue Beatrice.

Dante discovers that each circle of Hell reveals his own personal sins as well as those of its inhabitants, making his battle through the Inferno that much more difficult. The story might feel like a typical action-fantasy narrative, but Dante's journey becomes engaging as Dante's sins are revealed. It's difficult to see if Dante really is good or evil. The story mostly relies on over-the-top action, but the narrative of "Dante's Inferno" is remarkably captivating.

The gameplay in "Dante's Inferno" takes a tremendous amount of liberties from another violent and over-the-top action game, "God of War." Nearly everything, from the combat controls to the exploration design to the bloody finishing moves, is drawn from "God of War." Combat, despite its unoriginality, is satisfyingly visceral. Exploding corpses, bloody decapitations and ultra-violent attacks are all present in the player's arsenal.

Along with the typical combo

attacks, the player can upgrade abilities and stats with souls, the currency of the Inferno. These upgrades open some doors in combat variety, but the player mostly relies on simple combos to take out the demonic hordes. The battles can get repetitive, and they don't revolutionize the action game formula, but "Dante's Inferno" offers a guilty pleasure in simply tearing the damned of Hell a new one.

The borrowed elements of "Dante's Inferno" aren't limited to the combat. The exploration, also in the image of "God of War," is the biggest issue in the game. It feels neglected and boring. Between the battles, the player will need to swing from grapple points, climb walls composed of tortured souls and participate in frustrating jumping puzzles. Thanks to unresponsive jump controls and an uncooperative camera, "Dante's Inferno" is at its worst when not actually fighting demons. Even worse are the simple and slow "hit-the-switch" puzzles, which drag the frantic action to a halt. Despite its visceral combat, "Dante's Inferno" is a slow game, mostly thanks to boring puzzle design and the aforementioned jumping puzzles.

Fortunately, the atmosphere in "Dante's Inferno" is its most striking quality. Its portrayal of Hell is dark, horrific and unsettling. Enemies' designs characterize each of their respective circles of Hell. Slow and obese gluttons, serpentine

and skeletal heretics all move with fluid animation. The cinematics are very well-animated, but are at their best in the flashback sequences, which follow a comic book-style design, illustrating Dante's sinful acts in gory and gratuitous ways. The only real issue with the presentation is that the level design could've been a bit more diverse, especially in the beginning. Sound design is great, with solid voice acting, climactic themes during epic fights and powerful sound effects. Overall, the presentation is a fantastic complement to the source material.

"Dante's Inferno" might have the aesthetic and storyline down, but the gameplay doesn't do much to break the limit of action games. Flawed and annoyingly frequent exploration elements detract from the guilty pleasure of the combat. If you can overlook the lackluster exploration, "Dante's Inferno" is a decent rental. Its combat is over-the-top and visceral, the storyline is interesting, and the presentation effectively shows the doom and gloom of Hell.

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