

Coens release another great

Allegorical new movie from Coen brothers includes meaningful sound track and believable actors



BY ANDY MOORE
Reviewer

Joel and Ethan Coen have done it again with this triumphant dark comedy. "A Serious Man" stands apart from anything released this year, especially any of the films I've reviewed, because of its great literary and even prophetic value, comparable to a Greek tragedy.

Therefore, my lovely Index readers, watch this movie during Winter Break, because for some odd reason it is not currently showing in Kirksville.

What a pity too, because the Coen brothers create films that are near perfection. They always have astonished audiences with a combination of dark humor, hopeless realism and overall aesthetic quality. "A Serious Man" masters all of these.

"A Serious Man" begins in 19th century Eastern Europe with a man who returns home to his wife and announces that he has invited a rabbi to take



Photo courtesy of rottentomatoes.com

shelter at their house. His wife refuses to let him into the house because that particular rabbi has been dead for some time. She tells her husband the rabbi is a "dybbuk," an evil spirit from Jewish folklore that possesses the bodies of living people. The meaning of this scene still perplexes me.

The remainder of the film takes place in the late 1960s, when the winds of change were right around the corner, and focuses on a Midwestern Jewish family. Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg) is a college physics professor and has a mischievous son, an ungrateful daughter

and a wife who wants a divorce. Larry's wife Judith (Sari Lenick) wants to leave him for a more lighthearted and fortunate man named Sy Ableman, played by Fred Melamed, the Allen Ginsberg look-alike.

As Larry's life spins out of control, he is worried about being accepted for tenure at the university and is always anxious about money. To make matters worse, he has moved into a hotel with his lazy and irresponsible brother, Arthur (Richard Kind). Meanwhile, the world around Larry is changing. His bratty daughter Sarah (Jessica McManus) wants a nose job, and his

son Danny (Aaron Wolff) smokes a lot of pot.

The film is one that might take several viewings to fully understand, much like "No Country for Old Men." Do not be discouraged, though, because this may help. Throughout "A Serious Man," well-known psychedelic rock of the 1960s plays in the background on several occasions to slyly contrast with the fairly clean-cut Midwestern setting, but every lyric means something. You will see what I mean in one priceless scene toward the end of the film when a rabbi slowly recites the lyrics of a famous Jefferson Airplane song.

Several other reviews call "A Serious Man" a biblical allegory and relate it to the Book of Job, like the way the Coen brothers used "O Brother, Where Art Thou" to allude to Homer's "Odyssey." Allegory might be too simplistic of an analysis though, as this film requires rigorous thought and discussion, just like something you read for an English class.

After the all-star cast of "Burn After Reading," the Coen brothers have chosen mostly unknown talents, and it was a wise decision. Michael Stuhlbarg's convincing performance reminds one of the hopelessly unfortunate Jerry Lundegaard (William H. Macy) in "Fargo." If he was instead played by Larry David, the film would have a completely different meaning. The only recognizable face was Richard Kind, whose unexpectedly brilliant portrayal of the schmuck brother Arthur might bring his acting career to a new level. With this and his recurring role as Cousin Andy in HBO's "Curb Your Enthusiasm," Kind is an expert at playing the obnoxious relative.

The Coen brothers' films include the award-winning epic "No Country for Old Men," along with the equally praiseworthy "Miller's Crossing," "Barton Fink," "The Man Who Wasn't There" and "The Big Lebowski." These and the other Coen brothers films named in preceding paragraphs are movies you must see before you die, and they are all available at Pickler Memorial Library. "A Serious Man" is yet another great artistic achievement for the Coen brothers and the history of cinema.

Gaga climbs charts



BY COREY BOMMEL
Reviewer

Rush, the best band to come out of the Canadian Wilds progressive power trio, released a compilation of live cuts from various recordings last week.

"Working Men" brings together some of the best recordings from R30, Snakes and Arrows Live and Rush in Rio, three live DVDs from the past six years. Rush is in top form on these tracks, proving that they continue to be one of the hardest working bands still recording and touring. The amount of personality the band imbues into their instruments can be experienced without the visuals from the live recordings. The track list is very diverse, uniting songs from all of the band's various periods since their initial formation in 1968. Geddy Lee's voice has deepened somewhat with age, which for the most part is unnoticeable — the exception being "2112," where he struggles a bit to hit the high notes as his younger self would.

Neil Peart and Eric Lifeson have only gotten better with age, bouncing off each other flawlessly. The three musicians aren't afraid to improvise as the songs progress, challenging each other to keep up with the jamming. The only thing Peart doesn't bring to this album is a drum solo, and it just isn't Rush without him reminding us why he is the best drummer around.

There is only one previously unreleased live song, "One Little Victory," off of 2002's "Vapor Trails," and although the others are great to listen to, there are better versions of older songs on earlier live albums. Songs fade in and out between each other, which is not something you hear on most live albums, even those combining several performances, and it tends to pull you away from the overall energy that being there brings. The album just doesn't feel like a cohesive live performance.

This album might be seen as a quick way to make an easy buck by the record companies, but Rush is very particular about what they allow to be released. Rush completionists are the most likely group to buy this album, although it is an excellent chance for new fans to enjoy the energy of Rush's live performances.

"Working Men" is a great window into



Photo courtesy of myspace.com/ladygaga

Rush's live show, but for someone who already own the DVDs from which the tracks were ripped, there is little need to pick this up unless you want to play the CD in your car.

Electronic diva Lady Gaga released "Fame Monster" last week. The album consists of eight songs originally intended as a bonus disk to appear on a re-release of "The Fame," Gaga's debut album. Gaga decided to release this conceptually darker album separately, with only deluxe editions including "The Fame." This album's lyrics and structures are much more pop than "The Fame" electronica. The first track and single on the album, "Bad Romance," brings the electronica dance beats Gaga fans have come to expect. With deranged sounding lyrics — "I want your ugly / I want your disease" — and driving beats, this is a track bound to be in dance halls for years as it gets played and re-mixed.

"Teeth" consists of a catchy drum beat that sounds like a pop march to battle. Also notable is the duet with Beyoncé, "Telephone." Combining two huge pop stars, we haven't heard the last of this one. The repeating chorus, "Stop callin, stop callin / I don't wanna talk anymore!" keeps you bouncing to the beat.

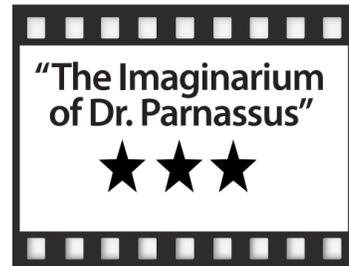
It's hard to believe that a year ago no one had heard of Lady Gaga, but now she is topping the charts and making news with every public appearance. You either love or hate Lady Gaga and her outlandish habits, but fans of the last album should pick up "The Fame Monster."

"The three musicians aren't afraid to improvise as the songs progress, challenging each other to keep up with the jamming."



Photo courtesy of rottentomatoes.com

Ledger triumphs in "Imaginarium"



BY KEN DUSOLD
Reviewer

In January 2008, production for Terry Gilliam's "The Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus" came to a halt with the sudden death of one of the film's main characters, Heath Ledger. With the death of a star and an unfinished film, Gilliam and writer Charles McKeown were forced to rewrite parts of the screenplay. The result is a well-acted, fantasy-driven and beautifully filmed movie with a paper-thin plot.

TIDP's essential underlying theme seems to be good versus evil, in which our title character (Christopher Plummer) regularly agrees to wagers with the devil, referred to as Mr. Nick (Tom Waits) throughout the film. Plummer's performance earns him the right to be called a legend.

In the opening scene, the bright lights and colors of Dr. Parnassus' horse-drawn side-show contrast with the dark, wet and murky streets of London at night.

Soon after being introduced to Dr. Parnassus and his show's cast of characters, we're drawn into the doctor's imaginarium beyond a mirror. Any lucky or, in some cases, unlucky person who steps through the mirror is welcome to take a look at that which is in their dreams, but is controlled by Parnassus. At the end of a person's experience within the magical world, they are given two choices: the evil one, which leads to death, or the good one, which serves as the mirror's exit.

As the film progresses, we are made aware of a secret Dr. Parnassus has been keeping from his teenage daughter, Valentina (Lily Cole). The secret involves her upcoming 16th birthday and a deal Parnassus made with the devil years prior. Interrupting their lives is Tony (Ledger), who Parnassus and his crew find hanging from a bridge over the

Thames River. His retrieval from impending death by Parnassus' young assistant Anton (Andrew Garfield) is a terrific stunt amid the impressive and commanding CGI graphics used to create the world inside the mirror.

Tony, although charming and smart, is hiding a secret of his own. As time ticks down on Parnassus' latest bet with Mr. Nick, Tony's chances of winning over Valentina and getting a fresh start on life dwindle.

Gilliam, who was a member of the famed British comedy troupe, Monty Python, does not fail to include plenty of humor. Countless midget jokes about Parnassus' most trusted friend (Verne Troyer) add comic relief to the strange happenings. One of the loudest laughs comes when Troyer appears in black-face and wig, only to be confused by wealthy onlookers for a poor African child. And like that, Gilliam successfully supplies the shtick, which is expected by Python fans.

Also familiar to Monty Python fans should be the CGI-created world of Parnassus' imaginarium, which looks very much like the animation in "Monty Python and the Holy Grail."

Supporting the brilliant acting of Plummer and Ledger, who reminds us of the comparatively unknown Lily Cole and Andrew Garfield. Both show outstanding potential and amazing depth in their roles. Johnny Depp, Jude Law and Colin Farrell each portray transformations of Tony during each of the three times he passes through the mirror. The three actors agreed to appear in the film in honor of their friend, Ledger. Each one takes on the persona of Tony almost to perfection, making it easy to forget it's not Ledger you're seeing on the screen.

Even with a brilliant cast, zany humor and imagery out of "Alice in Wonderland," the movie still falls short of greatness. Situations are tied loosely together so that we can get to the imaginarium, but are not fully explained, such as when Anton grabs a woman and forces her through the mirror. This moment has nothing to do with the plot. It's just there.

And the ending is too contrived. After two hours of film, it seems as though Gilliam just wanted to conclude everything quickly without explaining what has happened to the characters. The final scenes leave us trying to guess, to no avail, the setting, time and circumstances of their endings.

For Ledger and the cast, TIDP is a triumph. For Gilliam, it's a dream left unexplained.

"Imaginarium" opens nationwide Jan. 8.