

Magnetic Fields changes styles



BY COREY BOMMEL
Reviewer

The Magnetic Fields

On a magnet, every north pole must have a complementary south pole so as not to disturb the natural balance of nature. The Magnetic Fields recently released the final album, entitled "Realism," in their "no synth trilogy." Although "Realism" is supposed to be the companion piece to their 2008 album "Distortion," they would be better described as polar opposites. "Distortion" saw the band experimenting with different possible ways of distorting their music. With "Realism," the band discards complicated production methods and effects in favor of a toned down, acoustic folk-inspired album.

"Realism" blends British folk music from the 1960s and 1970s with American country elements and Victorian style to create a sound that, although foreign to many of this

era, is upbeat and enjoyable to listen to. The lyrics tend toward the depressing, expressing singer Stephin Merritt's bleak observations of a cynical world. This mixture creates a bittersweet album — the memory of the last kiss of lost love in an unfamiliar hallway.

The album is entirely acoustic with the exception of a little electric guitar in "The Dada Polka." Merritt employs a full range of instruments in his compositions, from stringed banjos and violins, to brass tubas and flugel horns and many other diverse methods of creating music. Because this is the final piece in the "no synth trilogy," Merritt's signature style of synth-pop is absent.

The blending of styles and instruments leads to a number of diverse tracks on "Realism." Some of the songs on the album are very kitschy, such as "We Are Having a Hootenanny Now," a hoedown song speaking of the absurdity of Scientology in Merritt's eyes. "The Dolls' Tea Party" includes a tinkling musical motif akin to a child's music box, thanks to an out-of-tune toy piano. Merritt is at his most melancholy

in "Always Already Gone," singing heartbroken to a past lover who needed to be free, "I tried hard to keep you / I needn't have tried / It seems you've decided / When did you decide?"

"Realism" superbly blends the lighthearted and childish with the darker side of life, letting us all know it's OK to embrace the lows we experience, as they only lead to greater heights. It is bittersweet to the end.

Beach House

This week Beach House released its third studio album "Teen Dream," delivering a healthy dose of melodic ambiance. Beach House exemplifies a genre that is not prominent: dream pop. It is the kind of music that accentuates a soft environment, a dinner party or a quiet, warm bedroom.

Alex Scally, one half of the duo, uses melodic guitar and repetitive drum beats as a canvas for the vocals to be painted onto. Influences such as 1970s era Fleetwood Mac, Heart's later career and ambient band M83 can be noted in the musical arrangements.

Singer/keyboardist Victoria Legrand emits a soothing siren song, but it seems as if she could wither away from lovesickness at any time. Despite the brighter, pop-

influenced sound, the album evokes a bleaker mood, bringing to mind nostalgic views of lost youth. Legrand sings of uncertainty, doubt and feeling put down by the rest of the world, the emotions of many teenagers at one point or another.

"Walk in the Park" is one of the bleakest tracks on the album. It is a journey taken alone — an introspective walk to forget someone who is no longer there. The choppy verses are driven along by the kicks of a cheap drum machine, beating out the steps taken down the healing road.

Legrand's best vocal performance can be found on "Real Love." It opens with only her and her piano, as she mellowly sings, "I met you somewhere in a hell beneath the stairs." Hearing her voice against such a sparse backdrop evokes a gospel quality.

"Teen Dream" is the kind of album you contemplate in a warm window seat, eyes closed, painting pictures in your mind of the sounds lifting through the air. The dreams and problems of the youth in "Teen Dream" are hardly for the young, but rather for the young at heart.

"Merritt employs a full range of instruments in his compositions, from stringed banjos and violins, to brass tubas and flugel horns."



"Dear John" a bust



BY KEN DUSOLD
Reviewer

If you are thinking about taking your special someone out to a movie this weekend, might I suggest renting "Love Actually" or "When Harry Met Sally" as an alternative? They are humorous and sweet enough to complement what is hopefully a lovely evening.

If, however, you want to dislike the world and drown yourself in depression and woe, go see "Dear John."

Channing Tatum and Amanda Seyfried star as Special Forces Sergeant John Tyree and his beach-maid, Savannah Curtis, in this adaptation of the Nicholas Sparks novel of the same name. Sparks is the author of such Kleenex-demanding favorites as "The Notebook" and "A Walk to Remember." "Dear John" as a film is not much different from these except you come to feel disdain for a number of the characters.

The story begins in a pre-9/11 South Carolina, with the chivalrous John jumping from a 20-foot pier to retrieve Miss Curtis' purse from the Atlantic Ocean. She thanks him by inviting him back to her place for a beer and the chance to meet her friends. In exchange, he takes her out on a date, where her curiosity about his father gets the better of her. She insists on going back to his place to meet Mr. Tyree (Richard Jenkins), a quiet man who

wears gloves when examining his massive coin collection. Why does she want to meet his father so badly? This is one example of the film's failure to explain, in any coherent manner, what is running through Curtis' mind.

After two weeks of frolicking with John, including Sunday night lasagna dinners with his dad, Savannah mentions that she thinks Mr. Tyree might have a mild case of autism. She is right, of course, but John gets angry. It is a touchy subject and she mentions it in an inappropriate manner, but she felt he should know. After more than 20 years, he never recognized this in his father. This is extremely difficult to believe.

John quickly gets over his anger, acknowledges his father's disability and gets a chance to say goodbye to Savannah before being shipped off to his base in Germany. They begin writing letters discussing everything going on in their lives. Then, terrorists attack the U.S. on Sept. 11. John re-enlists for more tours of duty and does not return for six years. Wait, why doesn't he return for six years?

The title of the film should answer that. Her new love (Henry Thomas) is an old friend, and we find out he has cancer, but again, her reasons for reacting how she does are unexplained and possibly inexplicable. Sparks must have needed more drama, because he crammed in this love interest out of nowhere. If you are not yet crying by this part of the movie, just think about how you cannot get your ticket reimbursed.

The only truly redeeming quality about this film is Richard Jenkins' per-



Photos courtesy of dearjohn-movie.com

"Dear John" might seem like a viable Valentine's Day option, but it comes up short.

formance as Mr. Tyree. Awards and accolades were created in the hope of honoring such acting. Jenkins is very much unappreciated by general audiences and by Hollywood filmmakers. There is something so captivating about his presence on screen that you wish he could be in more scenes. Jenkins' ability to put so much into a character we know nothing about is astounding. We do not know what he does for a living, why his wife is gone or even his first name until the end of the picture. But he makes us feel better,

despite everything else thrown at us during the movie. Indeed, it would be a much more compelling and beautiful story if this film were more about the briefly seen, but powerfully felt love between this father and his son.

Alas, it is not meant to be. Instead, the film uses love, war and autism as plot devices to make the target audience — teenage girls — bawl their eyes out. Well, pardon me if I'm more of a sucker for romantic-comedies. At least in that genre, love is not brutally toyed with and left taped together.

Bayonetta exhibits style, flair



BY ALEX CARLSON
Reviewer

Action games like "Resident Evil" and "Devil May Cry" have made waves in both Japan and North America. They have established an action game formula with enough visceral battles and over-the-top encounters to satisfy even the most starved of gamers. The developers at Platinum Games, however, decided to change the formula with a stylish main character and a cinematic new combat system. "Bayonetta" is the newest creation from Platinum Games, and it's a wild ride that simply cannot be missed.

The game follows a mysterious woman named Bayonetta, an amnesiac who quickly becomes trapped in the battle between Heaven and Hell. Angels and demons run rampant across the earth, and it's up to Bayonetta to finish the fight once and for all. She learns more about her mysterious past as she tackles these



Photo courtesy of gamespot.com

Bayonetta, available for Playstation 3 or XBOX 360, establishes a new combat system and new characters that make for exciting gameplay.

monsters. The story itself is nothing new, and the secondary characters aren't very interesting, but the game's shameless amount of sex appeal adds a surreal style to the entire story. The storyline in "Bayonetta" has a cheesiness to it, thanks in part to its inability to take itself seriously.

"Bayonetta" takes many of its trappings from "Devil May Cry," such as moves like running, jumping, shooting and melee attacks. "Bayonetta," however, has a number of new moves shaking up the otherwise familiar action game formula. The first and most important is Witch Time, a way for Bayonetta to slow down time and attack enemies for

extra damage. Bayonetta's Torture Attacks let her summon guillotines, presses and iron maidens to take out enemies in bloody, exciting ways. Finally, Climax Attacks let Bayonetta summon monsters from her hair to obliterate colossal foes.

These factors come together in stunning ways. The style and fluidity in the battle system are simply stellar. Bayonetta's huge skill set allows for plenty of ways to dispatch enemies, so the battles never get old. Pack in multiple weapons to buy and skills to learn, and you get a game with enough over-the-top combat to last a long time.

The game's design is mostly

linear, just like "Devil May Cry." You essentially run from Point A to Point B, with the road frequently closing off, forcing you to take out a group of enemies before progressing. In between the battles, puzzles occasionally arise that demand a bit of thought to solve.

The different enemy encounters are simply fantastic. Each type of enemy has its own unique abilities, and defeating them allows for new weapons to use. The boss battles are some of the most epic and colossal you'll find in an action game. Taking on a giant winged monster over a pit of lava is one thing, but try fighting it while in a temple that's in free fall. The game's

design might not seem too different from "Devil May Cry," but it takes the superb scope of its predecessor and makes it even more cinematic.

The presentation is a bullet time-infused joyride. There's rarely a moment in "Bayonetta" where the main character isn't running on walls, leaping from free-falling boulders or blasting enemies with the four guns equipped to her arms and legs. The cut scenes normally take place in film strip-inspired still frames, but the in-game graphics are unquestionably over-the-top and packed with sex appeal. Bayonetta's crazy poses and elegant attack animations contrast with the meathead stereotype of action games. A jazz-inspired sound track and some hilarious dialogue round out a presentation full of style.

"Bayonetta" isn't a revolutionary title, but it pours on the style at every opportunity. The end result is a game filled with memorable encounters, beautifully-crafted cinematics and a surreal inability to take itself seriously. Its storyline is cheesy, but everything else in the game is honed to the utmost detail. Visceral Torture Attacks, huge Climax Attacks and a great amount of diversity help the combat stand out in the crowded action genre. "Bayonetta" is the game to check out if you're looking for an action game with style to burn. It's an exciting roller coaster ride of a game from start to finish.