Wolfmother's rebirth is successful

COREY BOMMEL
Reviewer

Oceania, the area that includes Australia and New Zealand, has brought us many great things over the years. From Oceania's humble beginnings as a dumping ground for unwanted convicts to its more recent contributions as the perfect place to film the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, we always have looked to it in our time of need. But it's so much more than just a land of marsupials — it has produced some of the best rock bands of the last few decades.

Wolfmother tones reminiscent of Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath

Wolfmother's sophomore album "Cosmic Egg" shows the band creating music reminiscent of bands from the 1970s. The Australian natives have gone through some hardships since the 2005 release of their self-titled debut album. The band replaced all but one member prior to the recording of "Cosmic Egg," making this a release from Wolfmother 2.0.

Lead singer and guitarist Andrew Stockdale is the creative anchor for the band. Stockdale's vocals are reminiscent of a slightly more high-pitched Ozzy Osbourne, and his guitar riffs propel the album to great heights, be it during a wailing metal solo or a more laid-back rock riff.

The album kicks off with two '70s-metal-fueled tracks, with "California Queen" blazing in like a top Black Sabbath hit. "In the Morning" is a Rolling Stones influenced slow jam that is one of the most mellow songs on the album. "Cosmonaut" is another slower song but a great spacey song to chill out to. For a Guns N' Roses ballad, listen to "Caroline," an epic slow jam. The album ends with a lengthy epic, "Violence of the Sun," complete with explosive power chords and driving drum beats as Stockdale wails to the heavens.

Lyrically, the album is nothing special, because it is full of generic rock themes. Stockdale does provide commentary on the once shaky future of the band and its rebirth in the lyrics of a few songs. This album is a must buy for fans of classic rock like Ozzy-era Black Sabbath or Led Zeppelin.

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Band from HBO show releases second album

New Zealand's faux-folk comedy duo, Flight of the Conchords, is at it again with the release of "I Told You I Was Freaky."

Similar to their self-titled album released last year, "Freaky" contains tracks lifted straight from the Conchords' popular HBO show. The songs for the Conchords' television show were written ten years in advance with each episode formed around them. This formula created songs that are embedded solidly in popular culture, such as "Robots" and "Business Time."

With the second season, the songs and shows were written concurrently in a condensed amount of time, which is reflected in the quality of "Freaky." Most of the tracks cannot fully be appreciated without seeing the episode it was lifted from.

Creatively speaking, the Conchords do dip their toes into just about every genre, giving nods to several influential artists. "Rambling Through the Avenues of Time" is a near pitch-perfect tribute to the early works of Billy Joel.

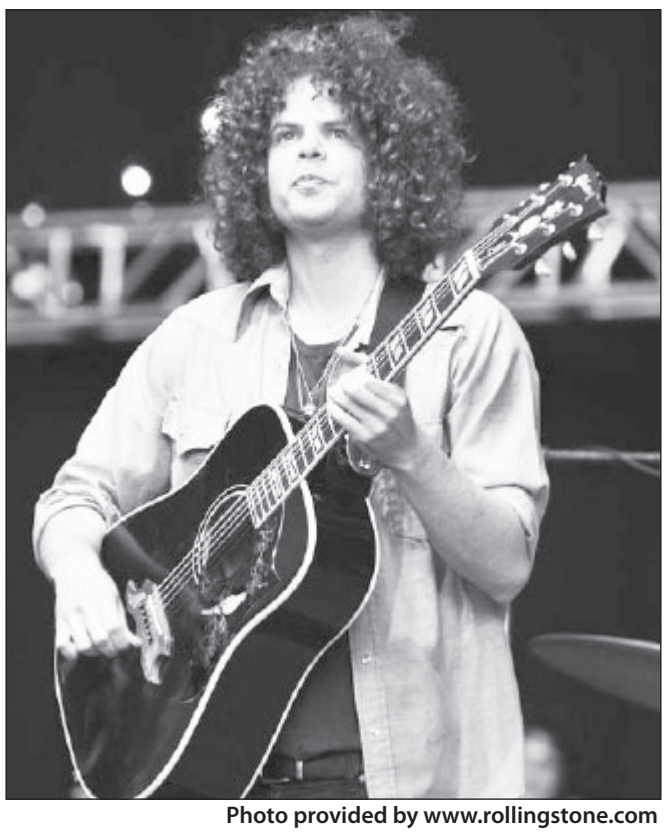
David Bowie always has been an influence to the Conchords' sound, and "Fashion is Danger" brings to mind the works of Bowie's later career. "You Don't Have to Be a Prostitute," a reggae rock track that parallels The Police's "Roxanne," is a fun track to bounce along with.

For those who love winding sea shanties about cannibalistic Eastern Europeans, "Petrov, Yelyena, and Me" is perfect. It's an upbeat song that produces humorous results but makes one wonder what actually was happening on the show to require the performance of such a song.

The duo flexes its rap muscles early in the album, but these turn out to be the weakest tracks if you have no idea what they are rapping about. "Hiphopopotamus Vs. Rhymenoceros," one of the band's earlier hits, would be a better goal to work toward in the rap department.

I would recommend this CD for fans of the show, but for new fans, I recommend looking up some of the band's early live albums, which capture the Conchords' unique Kiwi humor.

Photo provided by www.subpop.com



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"Paranormal" incites fear in viewers

ANDY MOORE
Reviewer

In a dark bedroom with strange noises, footsteps on squeaky floorboards, indistinct murmurs and objects that appear to move on their own, you have the overpowering sense that someone or something else is present.

The film "Paranormal Activity" plays on some of your most basic fears and brings them to life. As one man in the theater said, it was "more intense than I expected."

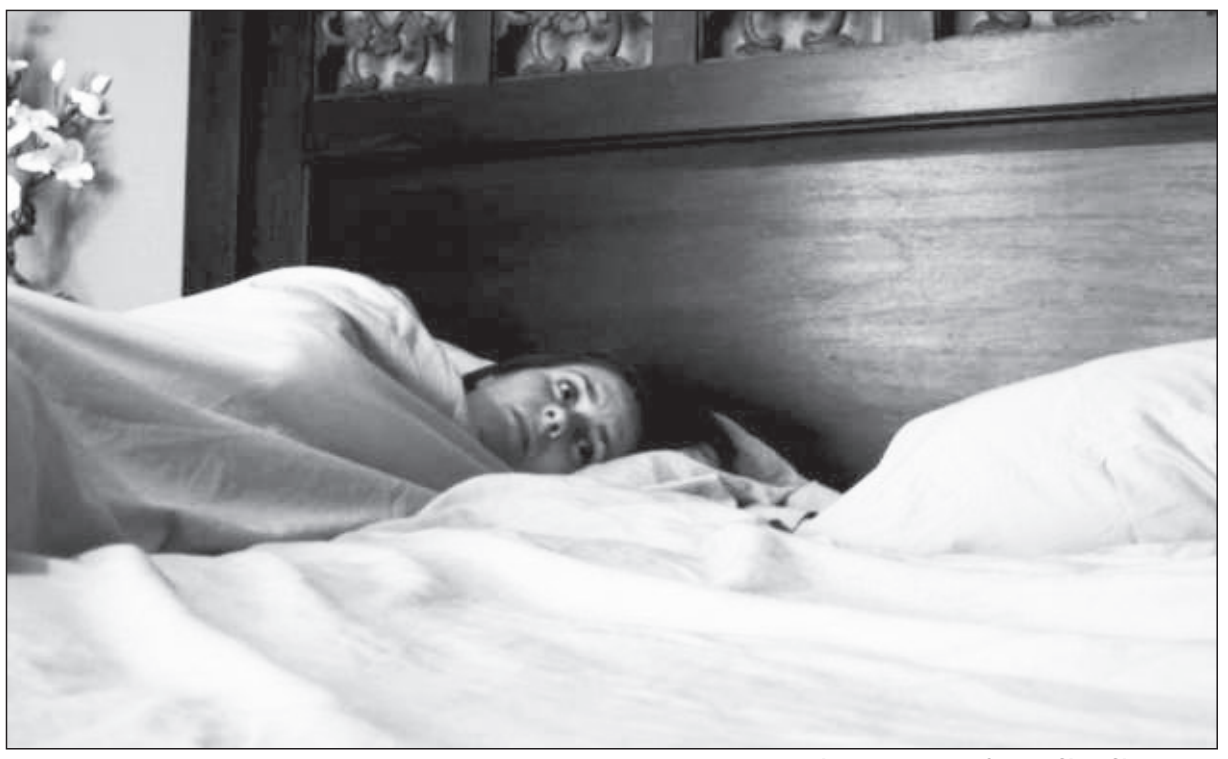

Photo courtesy of www.filmofilia.com

The sleeper hit "Paranormal Activity" was released to a limited audience at Hollywood's annual Screamfest Horror Film Festival in 2007, but it didn't reach a nationwide audience until three weeks ago. The film's trailers offer little information, so most of the film's notoriety came through the verbal grapevine, Twitter postings and other forms of viral marketing. Because the film originally was unavailable to most of the American public, online users demanded its release in several other major cities.

Oren Peli's directorial debut cost a meager $15,000 to produce and already has grossed more than $65 million in the United States and Canada, surpassing the box office success of "The Blair Witch Project." "Paranormal" has even received praise from legendary filmmaker Steven Spielberg.

The movie portrays a young couple, Katie (played by Katie Featherston) and Micah (Micah Sloat). Katie says she has been haunted by an unknown, supernatural being throughout her life. Her skeptical fiancée, Micah, then uses a video camera to capture the paranormal occurrences on film, and Katie hires a psychic to assess her situation. As you can imagine, their increasing interest in the paranormal presence only provokes the "being."

Every night, Micah sets the camera up on a tripod facing the bed to film themselves sleeping. While the two toss and turn in bed, the camera fast forwards in time, then slows down to real time and the "paranormal activity" ensues.

Like all documentary horror films, "Paranormal" blurs the line between reality and horror, because the audience is led to believe the movie is real, recovered footage. The shoddy amateur cinematography only makes it more real and terrifying, making the audience question if the footage in the movie was real. You must accept that in the final scene when the camera finally shuts off, it's the end of the line and the movie is over. It couldn't be more ambiguous.

Like "The Blair Witch Project," "Paranormal Activity" should be viewed in the theater to get the full effect. The aforementioned bedroom scenes get the most horrified reaction from the audience, who tense up in their seats while the theater is pitch black, and their attention is on a dimly lit bedroom where something seems hideously out of place.

In the tradition of Spielberg's "Poltergeist," the paranormal is captured using video and audio technology and the film incorporates a psychic. Although this is not the most original concept, Spielberg's story of a haunted house located on top of an Indian burial ground isn't that original either. Like an episode of "The X-Files," the things you fear the most in "Paranormal Activity" are concealed from the audience, and it can be more terrifying if you are still afraid of the dark.

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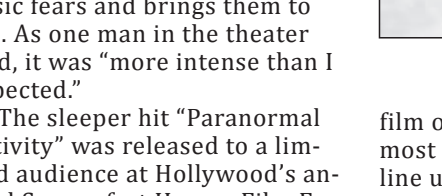
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