

New Film lives up to *Great Expectations*



Ethan Hawke as Finn and Gwyneth Paltrow as Estella have a passionate evening together in New York in *Great Expectations*.

by Kristi McKim
features editor

What originally is a fine novel depicting one boy's encounters with Britain's social classes has been tremendously altered into an Americanized, 'loosely adapted' cinematic version of *Great Expectations*.

This transformation of Charles Dickens' classic focuses not so much on the conflicts between the working class and aristocracy, as it highlights the dynamics among levels of artistic impulse and capitalistic success.

Directed by Alfonso Cuarón (*A Little Princess*), who proclaims David Lean's 1946 version of *Great Expectations* as one of his favorite films, this 1990s self-termed "elaboration rather than adaptation" of the novel proves entirely magnificent for its fine cinematic achievements.

Cuarón's *Great Expectations*, as opposed to Dickens', will not be remembered for its linguistic depth or literary greatness; the script is not particularly memorable or fantastic. Rather, this 1998 version lives as a classic for our time—as an epic of film-making, an exotic spectacle, an entirely sensual, tasteful rendering of unrequited love and fulfilled dreams.

This film explores timeless themes of subversive wanting and suppressed passion—the ways in which love can render one entirely numb to all other previous desires, and sometimes dangerously cause one to hold too 'great' of 'expectations' for oneself.

Ethan Hawke stars as Finnegan Bell, the movie's version of Philip "Pip" Pirrip. As the charming Finn, Hawke proves his versatile acting ability: he retains child-like innocence and curiosity while expressing a rugged, intense sensuality.

As the artist who paints out of pure impulse and inspiration, Hawke juxtaposes elements of his best roles (from *Dead Poet's Society* and *Before Sunrise*) to present the complexity of a character at once naive, spontaneous, and fun-loving. Sufficiently rendering his character's absolute desperation and longing for the unattainable Estella, Hawke seems natural as the lovesick, almost-pathetic Romantic hero.

In the role of the icy Estella Dinsmoor, Gwyneth Paltrow acts exquisitely as the long-time recipient of Finn's passions. Paltrow talentedly transforms a rather shallow, flatly-written character into a three-dimensional rendering of one woman's pressures to remain numb to love's warm-

ing qualities.

Conditioned to behave with indifference toward men, Estella gains a greater depth with Paltrow's fine depiction of the opposing pressures of womanhood: to remain independent and self-sufficient, while being open to love and marriage. As the glamourously-sophisticated Estella, Paltrow has never looked more stunning. But on the other hand, she has never acted more obnoxious or conceited; in the space of her character, though, such annoying traits are justified.

The film relies on the tension generated between Paltrow's and Hawke's characters; Hawke's intense passion versus Paltrow's subtle, unspoken desire provides for a remarkably-breathhtaking dynamic of sensual spontaneity.

In a supporting role as Ms. Dinsmoor, a wealthy and bitter recluse deserted twenty years earlier on her wedding day, Anne Bancroft delivers a rather gaudy adaptation of the novel's Miss Havisham. Since Dinsmoor offers nothing more to the film than her cosmetically-plastered, elaborately-costumed presence, her character grows increasingly irritating and repulsive. Bancroft, though, in her experience and talent, is capable of squeezing out of her utterly bland character some scenes of genuine warmth.

In the film's version of Magwitch, Robert DeNiro plays escaped convict Lustig. Though far too easily enamored with Finn's generosity, Lustig proves to be an otherwise believable character. DeNiro does as best he can to portray the pitiful hopelessness of this ex-mob-assassin. As always, DeNiro delivers a fine performance, regardless of the predictability of his character.

Nonetheless, the splendor of Hawke and Paltrow overshadow the less-developed plot lines of the supporting characters. While such a chemistry can be attributed to the actors' talents, the directing also contributes to the particular fineness of the film.

In *Great Expectations*, Cuarón focuses on the minute intricacies of character interrelations—and makes the subtle passions or unspoken words resonate far beyond the realm of verbal capacity. The power of merely a look to convey years of repressed passions, the delicate beauty and fervent longing which a small breath, a shared glance can evoke, the freedom of uninhibition and spontaneity—all of

these otherwise indescribable moments are captured eloquently within the frame of the film.

In addition to the visual spectacle, this film includes the sultry sounds of STP's ex-vocalist, Scott Weiland ("Lady, Your Roof Brings Me Down"), classic rock of the Grateful Dead ("Uncle John's Band"), the intense driving melody of Pulp ("Like A Friend"), and the breathily-chilling, nearly-intoxicating sounds of Soundgarden's Chris Cornell ("Sunshower"), providing for an appropriately amazing soundtrack to accompany the gorgeous scenes. The score, composed by Patrick Doyle (most noted for his work in *Sense & Sensibility*, *Henry V*, and *Hamlet*), is also expectedly fine.

The photography and cinematography serve to showcase nicely the well-produced/directed scenes. Director of Photography Emmanuel Lubezki (who also did exquisite work with *A Walk in the Clouds* and *Like Water For Chocolate*) coordinates the elements of production, making fine use of shadow, space and lighting to produce an overall magical effect.

With such a tremendous Hollywood spectacle inevitably comes the Hollywood-esque problems as well. Such are obvious in the far-too-easy narrative and the overly-pared-down plot lines. While the film is gorgeous for its visual strengths, beautiful acting, and musical components, the actual plot has no complexity, not to mention an absolute lack of overall development whatsoever.

Granted, Hawke's Finn is central to the film; but it should not be the case that the film's conclusion should consist of thirty minutes in which each character has his/her epiphanic moment in the arms of Finn—a far too easy ending for an otherwise gorgeous picture.

Aside from the simplistic narrative and shallow plot (a far cry from Dickens' complexly-structured novel), Cuarón's *Great Expectations* holds an overall grace which overshadows the film's faults.

With its fine directing, superb acting, and effective mixing of soundtrack with visual image, *Great Expectations* delivers a luscious spectacle of breathtaking scenes, beautiful pieces of art in themselves—and when considered together (with the exclusion of a few overly-melodramatic, far-too-easy scenes) provide for a tremendous work of art—absolutely worth seeing. (three stars)

Music Review: Wyclef Jean presents *The Carnival*

by John Amorose
staff writer

A hip hop album that's violence free, keeps the obscenities to a minimum, and shuns the art of sampling? That's unheard of in the 1990s. Why be original when you can take the beat from a record that's already a hit (how many times can an artist sample "The Jungle")? It's just too risky to make your own music, and everybody knows "it's all about the Benjamins, baby."

If you've nodded your head to any of these questions, don't buy Wyclef Jean's new album *The Carnival*. Wyclef ridicules the hip hop establishment, and with guitar in hand and dreadlocks twisted, he has changed the face of rap.

The Carnival is a circus of sound; combining Caribbean beats, live guitars, and the occasional symphonic accompaniment, all under one ethnically rich, yet universally appreciated big top. The opening track, "Apocalypse," is a simple, stripped-down rhyme, backed by a haunting female vocal from Christian Langle's "Concerto for One Voice," giving the song a middle-Eastern, western-Jersey feel.

"Gone 'Till November" is where Wyclef truly shines. Finally he unleashes his Marley-esque singing voice that made him famous with the Fugees. The song features Jean's acoustic guitar jelling with members of the New York Philharmonic

album itself.

The only problems that I have with this effort by Wyclef is the various "intro's" spaced throughout the album, especially the ongoing "trial" of Wyclef. These breaks in the music, although extremely popular in rap today, are completely unnecessary and take from the flow of music. The attempt at a cheap laugh is not worth compromising the credibility and seriousness of the work.

The Carnival is a circus of sound; combining Caribbean beats, live guitars, and the occasional symphonic accompaniment, all under one ethnically rich, yet universally appreciated big top.

The Carnival also features Lauryn Hill of the Fugees, as well as the sultans of sap the

Orchestra, creating a miasma of sound that overwhelms the senses and tickles the emotions.

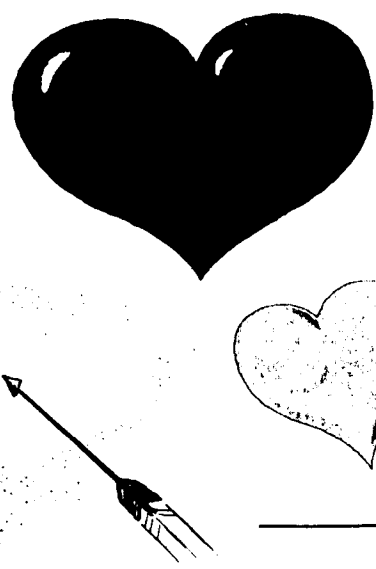
The catchiest tune on *The Carnival* is "We Still Trying to Stay Alive," the one and only cover song on the album; a groovier, funk-loaded version of the legendary Bee Gee's hit "Stayin' Alive." With a masterful baritone appearance by fellow Fugee, Pras, and that ever present, infectious guitar riff, this is a track that will be heard at parties and weddings for the next ten years, and is worth the price of the

Neville brothers, in a surprisingly catchy and almost completely un-nauseating love song, "Mona Lisa."

The album, as a whole, is a variable roller coaster of tempos, and should be recognized along side the best rap/hip hop albums of all time. On my classes-I'd-skip-to-go-see-him-scale, Wyclef Jean receives a four and a half out of five. He's the Bob Marley of our generation, and his imagination and musical genius is unmatched in modern hip hop.



Finn (Ethan Hawke) is shocked when, several years later, Lustig (Robert De Niro) visits him in New York.



Remember to place a Valentine classified for that special someone.

behrcoll4@aol.com

Chicken pox is contagious one to two days before the rash appears and until all the lesions are "crusted over."



Sponsored by
The Health and Wellness Center

Featured in next week's issue...

Jon Stubbs' review of the new film *Sphere*

John Amorose's review of Pearl Jam's new album *Yield*

Y	S	S	V	L	G	L	A	D	E	S	A	S	V
V	A	O	G	N	A	L	Z	E	L	E	L	L	E
S	I	R	I	S	E	S	E	E	L	S	A	L	S
S	N	A	R	E	R	S	R	E	N	I	O	C	O
P	T	A	N	A	L	A	N	I	N	O	S	L	I
E	R	A	T	E	V	E	S	S	E	A	S	S	E
D	R	A	P	A	R	A	T	E	C	A	M	E	L
T	H	E	P	L	A	T	E	N	U	S	O	P	E
T	H	E	R	E	C	A	T	U	R	E	C	A	R
B	O	P	A	R	I	B	O	P	A	R	A	M	A
S	S	E	M	W	E	M	A	H	E	M	A	L	M
D	E	A	D	S	E	T	B	A	W	L	E	D	E
E	A	L	Y	E	A	N	E	A	L	N	E	A	L
A	G	E	A	U	R	A	P	L	A	S	H	U	P
R	O	B	A	M	T	R	A	M	A	S	H	A	G