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'Kill Bill' slays the Coen Brothers

review by Daniel J. Stasiewski
a&e editor

The Coen Brothers and Quentin Tarantino are indie films royalty, so it's extraordinary seeing the filmmakers' relatively large-budget studio pictures both released on the same weekend. With the Coens' quick, subtle wit and love for imbecilic characters competing against Tarantino's stylish, hardcore storytelling, audiences had a chance for a perfect weekend of film.

Unfortunately for the Coens, "Intolerable Cruelty" lacks the pair's usual edge, while Tarantino uses his to chop of limbs of Japanese mafia members in the brilliant and bloody "Kill Bill: Vol. 1"

Intolerable Cruelty
★★ out of 4

In "Intolerable Cruelty," George Clooney plays the slick-talking divorce lawyer named Miles Massey. After making sure a real estate tycoon won't have to shell-out anything at his divorce hearing, Massey tries to come to terms with the emotions he has for the client's ex-wife (Catherine Zeta-Jones). He has to deal with weird feelings like "love" and "hope," but wooing the money-hungry woman proves difficult when her conniving ways send her to another millionaire.

The Coen Brothers are used to creat-

ing characters that deal used cars or bowl. The world of lawyers just wasn't made for their humor. The classic Coen wit is hard to find among jokes that are generally simple and predictable. Cedric the Entertainer plays a private detective whose character is essential to the plot, but bogs down the comedy with his repetitious declarations of "I nailed his ass." And Massey's partner is supposed to be funny in the same way "the sissy" character was back in the '40s.

At least the old Hollywood mentality pays off in the Clooney/Zeta-Jones banter. The two do make a glamorous pair, but it is hard to fall for a couple when they hire hit-men to take each other out.

As far as casts go, this one is as stacked as you can get. Geoffrey Rush, Cedric the Entertainer, Billy Bob Thornton, and Edward Herrmann all have appearances that are relatively small, but they are never utilized beyond a few sitcom-esque jokes.

The Coens' cynical vision of love in the 21st century is a rare gag that works. Romance is no longer a candlelight dinner or a bouquet of flowers. Instead, expressing love is as simple as tearing up a pre-nup.

Kill Bill: Vol. 1
★★★★ out of 4

A female assassin known as the Bride (Uma Thurman) is attacked by the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad on

her wedding day. The assassins kill her husband and unborn child and leave the Bride for dead. Upon waking from a coma four years later, she seeks out the five assassins that almost ended her life and destroyed her soul.

First (or last according to the discontinuous narrative), the Bride tracks down a Chinese-Japanese-American crime boss (Lucy Lui), and then terminates a suburban housewife (Vivica A. Fox). But she won't be satisfied until the enigmatic leader, Bill, is dead.

When I was watching "Kill Bill," I noticed my mouth was agape for most of the film. Conspicuously billed as Quentin Tarantino's fourth film, "Kill Bill: Vol. 1" is an awesome cinematic event. The characters are fantastic, ranging from Uma Thurman's bloodthirsty bride to Go Go (Chiaki Kuriyama), a 17-year-old Japanese girl in a school uniform with a knack for killing people.

Even the term "femme fatale" seems too timid for Tarantino's tenacious characters. The Bride's battle scene with the Crazy 88s, a Japanese gang lead by Lucy Lui's character, is beyond violent. The uncompromising slashing and slicing is a fan boy's wet dream and an editor's masterpiece. Sally Menke, the artist behind the editing, has worked with Tarantino on all his films and has outdone even her work in "Pulp Fiction" or "Reservoir Dogs" in the film.

As for the violence, it would take a



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Uma Thurman duels with Chiaki Kuriyama in Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill."

swimming pool to hold all the blood spilled in this flick. A 10-minute anime sequence seems gory enough, but Tarantino proves live action can rival even the best animation with his limb-chopping, head-popping rumbles. He makes bloodshed into an art form, and that's not from a fight choreography standpoint. Hell, if he only proves Uma Thurman looks good in red, that's enough for me.

"Kill Bill" was split into two movies by the same Miramax heads who last year made Scorsese chop up his epic "Gangs of New York," but volume one's ferocious bloodbaths make the film's

111-minute runtime seem like a flash. It could have easily survived its original four-hour length. Thankfully, the film's open ending is delicately laid out, unlike the disappointing paper cutter chops of "The Lord of the Rings" films.

"Kill Bill," directed by Quentin Tarantino, starring Uma Thurman, Vivica A. Fox, and Lucy Lui; and "Intolerable Cruelty," directed by Joel Coen, starring George Clooney and Catherine Zeta-Jones, are currently showing at Tinseltown and the West Erie Plaza Cinemas.

New Dandy Warhols use racy past to shape future

by Chuck Myers
Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service

A new album.
A major tour with a rock legend.
And an "Odditorium."
Idle time hardly seems to be a problem for the Dandy Warhols.

Once noted for its rambunctious, sometimes racy stage behavior, the power pop quartet of singer/guitarist Courtney Taylor, guitarist Peter Holmstrom (also known as Peter Loew, after he adopted the maiden last name of his wife), keyboardist Zia McCabe and drummer Brent DeBoer now draws attention with its richly layered sound.

On the heels of its widely praised 2000 album "Thirteen Tales From Urban Bohemia," the band's latest release, "Welcome to the Monkey House" (Capitol), may elevate The Dandy Warhols to a greater commercial plane.

"Welcome to the Monkey House" marks the fourth album by the Portland, Ore.-based band. The album exhibits sonic continuity with a smooth mix of aggressive and sensual numbers. Although content with the result, the band feels that "Thirteen Tales" was actually more musically diverse.

"I think that the 'Monkey House' is actually more of similar sounding record," says Holmstrom. "And it's just production value. Whereas on 'Thirteen Tales,' I thought we did cover a broader spectrum. But it's just in style. But, then again, both records fit together really well."

To help build the lush sound on "Monkey House," the band brought in Nick Rhodes of Duran Duran to assist with producing. While Rhodes added some distinctive touches, Holmstrom notes that his actual contributions to the album were very focused, particularly on the ethereal "Innocent."

"That's one of the two songs that Nick wrote and really, like, actually earned producer credit for," says Holmstrom. "It's kind of a title, and sort of a weird one. Because we'd been working on the record for about a year before he got involved. And the record pretty much sounded then the way it sounds now, except for 'Innocent' and 'Over It' ... The other ones (songs), he just sort of put the frosting on top."

Formed in 1992, The Dandy Warhols gained notoriety early on for its antics onstage, which reportedly included Taylor appearing in the nude during live performances. Today, the group prefers to focus on long concert sets rather than risqué visual surprises. The band generally shrugs off its colorful past, and thinks its live show reputation has been overblown.

"It's totally hyped up from the press," explains Holmstrom. "It's not something that ever hap-



PHOTO BY DAVE WRIGHT/KRT

Singer and guitarist Courtney Taylor, center, and guitarist Peter Holmstrom, right, perform during a Dandy Warhols concert in Washington, D.C., in September 2003.

pened all that often. It probably hasn't happened for five years, you know, but it still keeps coming up. It's gotten better on the last two albums. It really has. We sort of realized that all you had to do is put out a third record, and people took you a little more seriously."

Following in the footsteps of its namesake, artist Andy Warhol, the band is developing a Portland version of Warhol's once famous New York artistic hub, "The Factory." The goal of the group's "Odditorium" is to provide a creative haven where artists can work on projects.

"The building is going to be sort of our version of 'The Factory,'" says Holmstrom. "It's not a studio yet. But it will be. ... We shot our video there. And we've done photo shoots. There's a kitchen and a lounge. And we run our Web site out of there. And if we get everything we want, we'll be able to take in bands, bring them in and do their records, shoot their videos and everything."

With a North American early fall tour already in the bag, The Dandy Warhols have headed to Europe for a tour with David Bowie. Although the band would prefer to tour on its own, it couldn't turn down the opportunity to travel with Bowie, especially after the rock icon personally asked the group to be his opening act.

"It is full steam ahead," says Holmstrom. "The Bowie dates don't pay as well as dates on our own do. But the exposure is so great that the payoff is there. ... You know, out of all the bands he could have picked, yeah, obviously we feel honored."

College students create confessional poetry slam

by Mark K. Matthews
The Orlando Sentinel

Walking into a practice session of Us/Slam Cultural Jam feels like eavesdropping on an entire afternoon of intense group therapy.

"My friends wear big black sunglasses. Not because of fashion, but because their boyfriends punch them in the face."

"I'm a lesbian, but my mother cries whenever I bring it up. Mom said she would rather I shoot her in the head than tell her that."

It continues.

"I'm a proud virgin." "I'm the son of a drug addict." "I love this country." "I hate this country." "I'm gay." "I'm black." "I'm young."

"I'm angry."

"These guys have so much to say, but they don't have an avenue to express it," says producer Nao Tsurumaki.

To pry out this fury, Tsurumaki and a team of students and staff at the University of Central Florida created Us/Slam Cultural Jam, a spoken-word compilation that's raw in every facet.

The stories are uncomfortable, and the actors feel untested. The more than a dozen monologues -- more aptly, a series of confessionals told through rap, rant and poetry--are composed and performed by a generation of UCF students weaned on cynicism and looking for an outlet.

"We thought it would be great to make a show out of this environment. This has to be done by college students, by people of our generation," says Tsurumaki, 23. To take it beyond the typical parade of youthful angst, Tsurumaki and director Be Boyd tried to gather a large diversity of voices, to see how they contrasted both with each other and with mainstream thought.

"Everyone is going to have one piece they are totally going to agree with, and one that they will be totally offended by," says Victoria Hahl, 20, one of the performers.

"This show hopefully shows the dark side of this country, and the dark side of ourselves," Tsurumaki adds. "This age has the strongest things to say and the most sensitive things to say."

Even the show's title has been discussed and changed. At different points in the production, Boyd says, the name of the performance has alternately been Us/Slam Culture Jam and Us/Slam Culture Confessional. "Confessional" seems to be more fitting, she says, but "jam" just seems to sound better.

And "jam" also hints at part of the show's origins. Last spring, Boyd was teaching a theater class that focused on diversity when she and her students decided to try to create a show similar to Def Poetry Jam--a spoken-word performance that has morphed into a critically acclaimed Broadway show.

"It was built of a need for more performance opportunities and a need for the students to speak their mind," Boyd says. "This has been a vehicle to raise their voices."

The results have been a mix of views and formats. One student pays tribute to Gregory Hines,



HBO.COM

Saul Williams performs on "Def Poetry," HBO's slam poetry show.

the late tap dancer and actor, through music and dance. Another honors her father, a U.S. soldier who served in Vietnam. Others rail against the state of American politics. In many, sex, identity and stereotypes are common themes.

Mollie DuBose, a 21-year-old senior raised in Gainesville, Fla., tells the story of when she revealed to her parents that she likes girls. It's a free-form poem that underlines the very real nature of Us/Slam Cultural Jam.

"I'm trying to get my parents to come, but I don't think they will," DuBose says over coffee after a practice. "They've never missed anything I've ever done, even if I was doing stage crew."

About 200 people attended the opening slam Tuesday night, but DuBose's parents were not in the crowd. Instead, they have given her a book on "how not to be gay."

"They don't want to come because I'm talking about being gay," she said.

But "it has to be raw like that," says performer Nzingha Alexander, 20, of the slam subjects. "If it's not raw, it can't resonate as truth."

The hope, performers and organizers say, is that the truth of the confessionals will lure people to leap on stage and tell their own stories. And eventually, Boyd said, they would like to see Us/Slam Cultural Jam travel to different campuses and inspire more shows of its kind.

Alexander's story is a simple, angry missive to black men from black women. It's a monologue inspired by one phone call, but "there are a couple of other guys that helped mold it," she says.

"I was so upset. I hung up the phone, took out a writing pad and wrote it. I think it was a great time to write the piece," Alexander says.

It's changed little since then, and least of all her favorite portion: the finale.

"We're angry because we have a (expletive) right to be angry. But most of all, we're angry because we'd rather let you see us angry than to see us hurt."

A&E Editor's note: Interested in slam poetry? The Lion Entertainment Board will be sponsoring The Coffee House Series featuring a slam poet every Saturday in November. For more information call 898-6221 or visit www.clubs.psu.edu/bd/leb.