

The Screen Visions Film Series

Director Holley discusses humorous and haunting cloning film 'The Snowflake Crusade'

review by Daniel J. Stasiewski
a&e editor

To date, big-budget sci-fi films like "The 6th Day" and "Star Wars: Episode II" are the only mainstream pictures that have attempted to tackle the social and political repercussions of cloning. Unlike Megan Holley's low-budget feature "The Snowflake Crusade," these studio films see clones as uber-warriors, not human experiments.

Holley's film doesn't have clone-on-clone shoot-outs or light saber duels. Instead, "The Snowflake Crusade" relies on its quick, sardonic humor and dark political undertones. The creation of the film's contemporary-future world makes every scene visually enthralling. And that's without any space-craft blowing-up.

In the future, the DNA of the world's elite will be used for exclusive cloning purposes, insuring proper genetic specimens are used to create superior clones. In theory, the idea works, but it's only a matter of time until one of the clones turns out like Clive (Scott Mackenzie).

Clive was produced from the DNA

of a Nobel Prize-winning bio-engineer and has lived his life in the shadow of his "pre-me." In his youth, the troubled clone turned to drug use and petty theft to fulfill his urge to destroy his predecessor's image and create a unique personality, but his actions only resulted in jail time and trips to psychiatric hospitals.

When his most recent mental ward home needs to create room for more patients, Clive is sent to a halfway house where he is set up with a job at Debtcon, the second-largest debt consolidation firm in the country. His boss is insincerely supportive, hiding his corporate agenda behind the "creating better people" motto. Clive spends his time emptying trash cans and refilling toilet papers, like all clones of super-intelligent geneticists should.

Clive still clings onto his mischievous ways until he meets Marigold (Leisha Hailey), a narcoleptic telemarketer at Debtcon. Clive and Marigold form a strong bond, enjoying each other's eccentricities and making prank calls to celebrities. They even steal a bunny together. Just when Clive starts to forget about his old hab-

its and detestable heritage, a blatant reminder sends him over the edge.

There is something brilliant about Holley's image of the future, where postage stamps cost 98 cents and people still use rotary phones. It's the subtle things, like that or Clive's grubby "World Larger Producer of Natural Gas" T-shirt, that make Holley's film fun to watch the first time.

I've seen this film at least 10 times and understand it's not the surface search for individuality that makes the film interesting. Holley does play with Clive's longing for uniqueness, using mirrors not as a tool of introspection a la Scorsese, but rather as a vision of a stranger. The sci-fi tale is almost Kubrickian.

Other than that, the story of Clive and Marigold is sustained by rampant dialogue, comparable to the verbal battalions of a Kevin Smith or Tarantino film. Mackenzie and Hailey deliver the vibrant banter with an unexpected zeal and flattering ease. Their relationship is sweet, which is a bizarre description for a haunting sci-fi film.

The background political battle, usu-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Scott Mackenzie clones around in "The Snowflake Crusade."

ally told through TV sets that are left on while other plot developments take place, is the film's most significant contribution to the sci-fi genre. The socio-political debate on cloning and reproductive rights could have been taken from a Philip K. Dick story, but Holley's humor is combined with the occasionally dark futuristic themes to create a science fiction film with a

unique vision that is rarely seen any movie today.



"The Snowflake Crusade" will be shown as part of the Screen Visions Film Series on Tuesday at 7 p.m.

in Reed 117. Director Megan Holley will be on hand for a post-show Q&A. Admission is free.

Eastwood's 'River' a modern masterpiece

review by Daniel J. Stasiewski
a&e editor

As the credits rolled on "Mystic River," a staggering sensation of emotional exhaustion engulfed my mind and body. I was positive I'd seen a cinematic miracle, a rare story told artfully and emotionally. I was sure I'd just seen a classic.

"Mystic River" is a dark and tragic crime drama directed by Clint Eastwood, whose directorial triumph "Unforgiven" told an old West tale of vengeance and justice. This film isn't too far off. But what Eastwood does here is masterfully meld the basic idea of revenge with an epic drama of infinite passion and grievous salvation. It's a tragic story with unsympathetic characters and a meticulous narrative that is as unforgettable as it is powerful.

The film begins when the three central characters are children. They do what most kids did in the '70s before Cartoon Network and Playstation; they play outside. Jimmy gets bored and looks to get into some trouble, but all he does is write his name in wet cement. Sean joins in the fun, but when Dave begins to write his name, a man pretending to be a cop reprimands the boys for defacing municipal property and takes Dave away. He's molested for four days until he escapes.

Dave (Tim Robbins) grows up to have a family, and spends his time playing ball his son. He carries himself like a beaten man, walking with his shoulders sagging and head down, his distant eyes always far from his Boston neighborhood. His pals Jimmy (Sean Penn) and Sean (Kevin Bacon) went in different directions, so the trio isn't as close as they were when they were kids. Sean became a homicide detective for the Massachusetts State Police and Jimmy spent some time in prison for robbery.

Jimmy is a reformed thug who still looks like a mob boss but prefers the straight life of a neighborhood convenience store owner. That is until his oldest daughter is murdered. Sean and his partner (Laurence Fishburne) are called to investigate and the three friends reunite under dire circumstances.

Jimmy gradually slips back into his criminal past to find his daughter's killer, while Sean looks into the girl's relationships. Dave, whose mind is slipping in and out of sanity, doesn't mention his mysterious violent encounter on the night Jimmy's daughter was murdered. His wife Celeste's (Marcia Gay Harden) knowledge of the bloody evening makes her suspicious of her husband, especially when he becomes a suspect.

Laura Linney is also in this film, playing Sean Penn's unassuming wife. She's on screen for no more than 15 minutes, but her performance is a riveting portrayal of devotion and ambition. Now, imagine what the other players offer during the entire runtime.

Sean Penn is fantastic, giving quite possibly the best performance of his career. He portrays his character with the brutality expected of an ex-con and the heartbreaking sincerity of devoted father. Penn knows his character is almost unlikable, but he forces the audience to still care about him and his hunger for revenge.

Likewise, Robbins plays a character with an



WARNER BROS. PICTURES

Sean Penn consoles Marcia Gay Harden in "Mystic River."

emotional burden that would crush any man. His performance isn't as overtly dramatic as Penn's, but Robbins' quiet anguish with an occasional burst of mental instability guides the picture to its tragic end.

Bacon and Harden also give performances unlike anything they've done before, treating the complex and intense character with the respect and passion they deserve. But the performances do not over shadow a film whose director is as visionary as he is famous.

Eastwood constructs a film with the heart and mind of a true enthusiast. He wrote the film's haunting score and seems completely immersed in the film's classical creation. His production mirrors the dark thematic values of the '70s and contains the production values of a film from Hollywood's golden age. His style is simple and effective, allowing the modern story to interweave itself in the classic filmmaking processes. I could throw comparisons out all day -- "Traffic" or "Shawshank Redemption" or "Schindler's List" or "American Beauty" or even "Babe" -- but my point is made by simply saying "Mystic River" is a modern masterpiece.

Even as I write this I know there are going to be dissenters who write off "Mystic River" as a simple cop flick with a rather predictable twist. But believing this film is just another police drama is like viewing "Silence of the Lambs" as an episode of "NYPD Blue." If the twist is your complaint, then you missed the point. "Mystic River" is truly masterful and entirely unforgettable. And I loved every moment.



"Mystic River," directed by Clint Eastwood and starring Sean Penn, Tim Robbins, and Kevin Bacon, is

currently showing at Tinseltown.

Rhythms of Life Series kicks off second season

preview by Heather Peterson
staff writer

The Rhythms of Life Series opens its second season at Behrend on Wednesday with a performance by percussionist Tom Teasley.

The show will feature songs from his critically acclaimed CD titled "Global Groovilization." His show is a percussive performance with West African, Indian, and Middle Eastern influences as well as some elements of jazz.

Last season, was the first for this program, which is developed through the Office of Student Affairs and funded by SAF.

Lydia Ramirez's "I Love America," a sitar player named Alif Laila, and muMs who is a poet and performer from the HBO series "Oz" were part of the inaugural season.

Another act that was a big hit last year was a group known as Sub-Atomic Frequency Modulation Overdose. They featured an exciting show that included the use of stilts, graffiti, poetry, and digital animation.

All the performances provided a look at the different ways that cultures express their creativity and uniqueness through music and the arts. Due to the success of last season, Behrend will have the opportunity to experience more of these kinds of performances throughout the second season of the series.

The purpose of the Rhythms of Life Series is to allow students, staff, and the general public to have the opportunity to experience diversity through a popular, familiar medium they can easily relate to. Many of the performances will have very different sounds, instruments, and mediums that are used in order to convey their purpose.

Teasley's performance is the first in this year's series. The Washington Post has called him a "...percussionist in the widest and most exuberant sense of the word." He has performed in many different places



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tom Teasley beats his drums in one of his groovy shows.

and he usually does around 100 shows a year.

Before his stop at Behrend, Teasley will visit Bethesda, Md. He will follow his Behrend show in Louisville, Ky.

Teasley, who holds a master's degree in music from the Catholic University of America, incorporates many different elements into his works. He explores music from ancient time periods to today's electronic options. Elements from many different musical backgrounds are demonstrated through the use of his various percussive instruments.

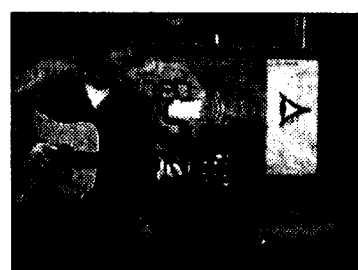
His setup includes bass and snare drums, hi-hats, cymbals, and a wide array of assorted percussion items.

Teasley's "Global Groovilization" performance will be held in the Reed Wintergarden on Wednesday from noon to 1 p.m. The show is free and open to the public. For more information about the performance, set up, and Teasley's extensive career, visit his Web site at www.tomteasley.com.

The Rhythms of Life Performances will continue to bring diverse, cultural performances to Behrend throughout the year.

A&E Event Spotlight

Monday through Nov. 2



LEB's Coffee House Series, Part 1

featuring guitarist Eric Hutchinson and poet Kamal

Couches and stools replace the usual tables and chairs in front of the Bruno's stage on Nov. 1 at 8 p.m.

The makeover is part of the Lion Entertainment Board's month-long Coffee House Series featuring acoustic guitarists and performance poets.

This week the event kicks off with guitarist Eric Hutchinson and performance poet Kamal. Hutchinson is a 22-year-old singer/songwriter whose music has been described as "light and mischievous folk pop from the gene pool of The Beatles, Elvis Costello, Ben Folds Five and Paul Simon" by CDBaby.com.

Bruno's coffee shop will be open during both performances.

Every Saturday in November features a different poet and musician, with an open-mic night set for the Nov. 22 event.

To join the Coffee House Series Open-Mic Night, contact Jen Bragan at 898-6221 or visit www.clubs.psu.edu/bd/leb.

For more information on Hutchinson visit www.eric-hutchinson.com.

Want to spotlight an event? Send suggestions for Nov. 3-9 to djs395@psu.edu.