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# 'Freddy 3' remains Fishburne's best film

## ..... or why 'The Matrix Revolutions' sucks so bad

by Chris Hvizdak  
contributing writer

Before Wednesday morning I would have thought the only way to fail at being pointless would be to have a point. "Matrix 3" (I will no longer dignify the movie by using its full title) has opened my eyes to an entirely new dimension of pointless failure, a concept which will take significant energy to integrate into my personal knowledge matrix.

Yes, I said matrix in a manner non-referential to the movie. Over the past four years anyone using "that word" in such a context would be showered with a barrage of giggles and the phrase "I know kung-fu." After seeing "Matrix 3," I feel I have the provenance to reclaim "that word" in the name of all English-speaking people. So here we go:

**Matrix:** "1. A situation or surrounding substance within which something else originates, develops, or is contained: 'Freedom of expression is the matrix, the indispensable condition, of nearly every form of freedom' (Benjamin N. Cardozo)." - www.dictionary.com  
2. An enjoyable 1999 motion picture characterized by then cutting edge special effects and a story composed of ideas mostly plagiarized from authors Phillip K. Dick (Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?) and William Gibson (Neuromancer). Followed by two revolting sequels notable for their bland characters, tedious action sequences and painfully shallow storylines. - Chris Hvizdak

Is it acceptable for a movie to be pointless? Sure. One (not "the one," the royal one) can argue that lots of movies deemed great are pointless. Personally



PHOTO BY ZAP2IT.COM

"The Matrix's" Laurence Fishburne turns his back on this review in an attempt to horrify the reviewer with his frightfully polka-dotted overcoat.

I love Orson Welles and do not have a problem with the argument that "Citizen Kane" has no point other than to explore Welles' fixation with the axiom that "Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely." That's because I enjoy Orson Welles. I also enjoy "Dude, Where's My Car?," which coincidentally has a far more concrete storyline and resolution than "Matrix 3." Did you think all that tedious pseudo-philosophy the Wachowskis spent a good chunk of the second movie spewing would amount to something? I hoped it would - but it

doesn't. There is no payoff in "Matrix 3."

The picture ends up coming off like some hypothetical jerk who bopped by Barnes and Noble on his way home from the tanning salon and skimmed a copy of "Philosophy for Dummies" so he can, in his own words, "Score some brainy chicks." Just like our hypothetical jerk, from "The Cave" to causality, "Matrix 3" does some name-dropping and alludes to a lot of things, but it never quite brings them together. Nor does it manage even to simply present a set of ideas in an interesting or thought-provoking context. No questions are raised; no ideas are expounded upon. We, the audience, end up feeling like a hypothetical "brainy chick" that went home with our hypothetical jerk, used and abused, and in our case out of \$7.50.

Of course a movie need not culminate in a point to be entertaining and "Matrix 3" might have succeeded in that respect if its characters were not perpetually deadpan and its action not unrelenting repetitive torture. In sharp contrast, "Dude, Where's My Car?" achieves far and beyond "Matrix 3" by providing us not only with an enjoyable 90 minutes of hilarity, but 90 minutes of hilarity that result in a (comparatively) creative and exhilarating resolution. Even the "Planet of the Apes" remake, as thoroughly terrible as it is, attempts to end in an interesting manner, the attempt putting it far ahead in the running.

So do you want to see "Matrix 3?" If you're curious about how the story "ends" and hearing it from some poor schmuck who paid to do so isn't enough - maybe. If you want to see what a million dollars a minute worth of special effects look like - maybe. You will see a lot of expensive special effects, but

remember that you've seen the vast majority of them in the first two movies. Occasionally a shot crops up that has something new and interesting, but I'd say that occurs less than half a dozen times during the two plus hours. You will see more action than in the second movie. However, bear in mind that the action in this movie is even more tedious than in "Matrix 2" and there are sequences that, once they pass the half-hour mark, you may simply want to end.

As I find "Matrix 3" to be highly denigrating to all people and, in the interest of adapting my reactions to the widest possible swath of audiences, I'll wrap this up with two fictitious mini-reviews. The first is designed to evaluate the "Matrix 3" on its own patronizing terms, and the second via a respected method of film critique. (Author's Note: Please bear in mind that I'm not a crazy sexist, I'm simply attempting to illustrate how this movie makes victims of us all.)

**No. 1. Fictitious Maxim Review:**  
"Matrix 3" is like a reasonably hot chick, a 6 or a 7, who is pretty dumb. After awhile you get bored with it's average attractiveness and find it to be shallow and incoherent. You will wish you hadn't wasted any of your time on it to begin with."

**No. 2. Fictitious Joe Bob Briggs (of TNT's Monstervision) Review:**

"Second crappy sequel to a pretty good first movie. We've seen all the action before in the first two, so that leaves us only to experience the awesome profundness of its story, which I'm certain will leave you all in tears for one reason or another.

Things to Look For:

- 1 "Bum-Fight"
- 2 Face Gouges
- 4 Breasts

Improper use of Igia Electric Facial Hair Removal System  
Goofy Religious Imagery  
Goofy Wizard of Oz Imagery  
Gratuitous Bad One Liners (nothing so well written as "I know kung-fu.")  
Gratuitous Robot Man-Suit vs. Robot Squid Battle  
Gratuitous use of minor, uninteresting characters  
Gratuitous Rave full of creepy leather-nipple freaks  
Superman-Fu  
Hover-Boat-Fu  
Source-Fu  
Jedi-Fu  
Rebar-Fu

No Stars.  
(Don't) Roll it."

Personally I'd say the Wachowskis should have stopped while they were ahead, or continued synthesizing \*cough\* plagiarizing \*cough\* other peoples ideas into their own little world of slow-mo backyard wraslin'. Ultimately "Matrix 3" is consumed by said pseudo-philosophy and fails to live up to the "accidental profoundness" of the first film. If you're going to skip this heap but still need a flick try "Starship Troopers," "Ghostbusters" or "Back to the Future 2." They're all pretty good.

Chris Hvizdak (viztron.tripod.com; toastmaster@iname.com) has recently been contracted to write/direct the big-budget epic "Beetlejuice vs. Ghostdad" for Levar Burton's RRP (Reading Rainbow Pictures) Inc. Read about his adventures in the project's production log at [www.livejournal.com/~hviz](http://www.livejournal.com/~hviz).

# Shepard's story inspires emotional telefilms

by Chuck Barney  
Knight Ridder Newspapers

On Oct. 6, 1998, Matthew Shepard, a gay college student, was savagely beaten with the butt of a pistol, tied to a cattle fence and left to die in the freezing countryside outside Laramie, Wyo.

Nearly 3-1/2 years later, television is poised to revisit, in a major way, one of the most notorious hate crimes of our time. On Saturday, HBO debuts "The Laramie Project," a movie based on the highly acclaimed play of the same name. A week later, NBC offers "The Matthew Shepard Story," a biographical telefilm produced by, among others, Goldie Hawn.

Matthew's mother, Judy Shepard, is greeting the fresh wave of exposure with mixed emotions. On the one hand, she embraces the opportunity it brings to amplify the call for social justice. On the other, she fears it will rip open old wounds.

"I worry about some of the negative comments that might surface in the press - particularly from the religious right. Hurtful comments like 'He was asking for it' and things like that," she says. "But hopefully, the good will outweigh the bad with both films. Like any mother, you want everybody to love your kids."

These latest productions follow on the heels of last January's "Anatomy of a Hate Crime," a movie about the Shepard case that aired on MTV. In addition, there have been documentaries, books and other explorations. Clearly, the creative community continues to be intrigued by Shepard's murder and the incredible fallout it generated.

"We're moved by it because the nation was moved," says Moises Kaufman, director and lead writer on "The Laramie Project." "It was a watershed moment in our culture. It was the first hate crime that woke this nation up and had us saying, 'This can't be happening. This shouldn't be happening.'"

Kaufman believes the Shepard story resonated for a number of reasons, including the symbolic nature of the crime. "He was tied and left hanging on a fence, which conjured up crucifixion imagery, and our culture is very sensitive to that kind of imagery," he says. "Also, he didn't die right away (Shepard was in a coma for five days), so, for a while, we became emotionally invested in his possible recovery, hoping that he'd make it."

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, says Kaufman, the 5-foot-2, 21-year-old Shepard was "photogenic and angelic" - a young man just start-

ing out in life, who easily could have been a neighbor or friend.

"To be blunt, it would have been much more difficult for the country to relate to a big-city African-American or Hispanic drag queen who met his end in a dark alley somewhere," he says. "Matthew was seen as a worthy victim."

Four weeks after the murder, Kaufman and eight members of his New York-based Tectonic Theatre Project traveled to Laramie. There they recorded interviews with more than 200 townspeople over an 18-month period and attended the trials of Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, who are serving life sentences for the crime.

The troupe's material was distilled into a three-act docudrama featuring more than 60 speaking parts, each with its own perspective on Shepard, his killers and the events that inextricably linked them. The play premiered in Denver in early 2000 and went on to become an off-Broadway hit. In the Bay Area, Berkeley Repertory Theatre staged "The Laramie Project" in April 2001.

Kaufman's film version was developed through the Sundance Film Lab and was chosen to kick off this year's edition of the prestigious film festival; it opened to mostly favorable reviews.

HBO Films president Colin Callender points out the provocative "Laramie" arrives at a highly appropriate time. "It has remarkable resonance in the post-September 11 consciousness, and not just as an exploration of a hate crime," Callender says. "It's fundamentally the story of a community forced to face itself in the wake of a tragedy under the glare of the national press - and in the process, reexamining and reaffirming its sense of self."

Shepard is never depicted in "The Laramie Project," nor is the crime enacted. It is, however, described by the killers, and its severity is conveyed through the actors playing police and medical personnel. The effect, nonetheless, is chilling.

"The Laramie Project" marked Kaufman's first foray into movies, and the resulting film is more literal and external than his play. While the stage version featured eight actors playing 64 parts on a spare stage, the movie relies on a 64-person ensemble of mostly familiar actors, including Steve Buscemi, Peter Fonda, Laura Linney, Camryn Manheim, Christina Ricci and Amy Madigan. Actual news footage is also intercut with the performances, and viewers get a sense of place through shots of Laramie's beautiful

skies and stark landscape.

Some who have experienced the play may find the use of celebrity cameos to be a bit off-putting, and perhaps some sense of intimacy is lost. But the film still packs an emotional wallop, and makes effective statements about the roots of prejudice and the communities in which we live.

Although Kaufman points out that the play is now touring the country and "has a life of its own," he was eager to reach a much wider audience through television, a medium that has assumed a major role in the production of independent films.

"Millions of homes, along with every motel in the country, have HBO," he says. "This allows us to get our work into the cultural bloodstream much quicker than a theatrical release."

Judy Shepard has never seen "The Laramie Project," but she has read the scripts from both the play and film and considers the piece a "wonderful" endeavor.

"I'm just not ready to relive some of the things they get into," she says. "I told Moises that I'd tape it, though, and someday I'll watch it and, I'm sure, pause the VCR several times to cry."

Judy and her husband, Dennis, however, were involved in NBC's "The Matthew Shepard Story." They sold the film rights to Hawn's production company, approved the final script, and Judy visited the set early on in production. The family's relationship with Hollywood, however, was initially a tentative one.

"We really wanted to avoid the whole movie thing for a while. I don't know of anybody who wants their life to be a movie of the week," she says. "But it became apparent that others were doing things that we weren't fully comfortable with. After meeting with Goldie and her people, we realized they would approach the project with passion and dignity."

In comparison to "The Laramie Project," NBC's piece, which stars Stockard Channing and Sam Waterson as Matthew's parents, takes a much more conventional telefilm approach. Still, it contains a family viewpoint that "Laramie" doesn't, and viewers who take the time to see both movies will come away with more pieces to the puzzle.

The film's dramatic thrust is pegged to the couple's changing and conflicting emotions during the murder trial, when they are compelled to draft a public statement asking the jury for either the death penalty or the kind of mercy the killers never showed their son. Against this backdrop, Matthew's often tumultuous life is recalled in a



HBO FILMS  
Christina Ricci in the somber "Laramie Project."

series of flashbacks.

"It's a very, very dark and sad story," says Shane Meier, the actor who plays Matthew Shepard. "But it's an important story. I want the world to realize what happened and what is still happening. This is not made up."

Meier, who researched his role partially by interviewing members of the gay community in his hometown of Vancouver, Canada, says he was stunned to learn that so many of those he talked to had recently suffered some form of harassment and/or abuse - from verbal slurs to assault and robbery.

Working on the film has been a "life-changing experience," Meier says. Last week, he joined Judy for a few public speaking engagements in Denver, where they addressed the issues of discrimination and intolerance.

"I told her I want to help in any way I can. I want to have an impact," he says. "I know I'm going to carry around a little piece of Matthew with me forever."

As for Judy, she hopes "The Matthew Shepard Story" will convey the essence of her son's life and help viewers to get to know the young man behind all the horrifying headlines.

"I want people to understand that Matthew was just like any other person on the planet," she says. "He just wanted to be happy."

"The Laramie Project," sponsored by Trigon, will be shown on Thursday in Reed 117 at 6:30 p.m. Sponsored by Trigon.