

CULTURE COMMENTARY

HOLLYWON'T

Money over merit

DAN KINEM
staff writer

It's quite obvious to most film fans that there has been a huge decline in the quality of American films in recent years. Sadly, most Americans are blissfully unaware that they are being fed a steady diet of cash-grabbing garbage.

Movies were once born of artistic visions and good stories. The story, the vision, the art came first. Nowadays it seems money is the only concern. It is no longer about making a good film but making a film that sells. Very few times do both things happen simultaneously.

On the rare occasion that a quality American film does surface, studios don't promote it, which causes it to fall quietly into obscurity. The quality of films being released is based on ticket sales, not on whether the film has any merit.

When a film is a hit, studios immediately exploit it. So it is little wonder that many of the films coming out each week are remakes, sequels, or adaptations (specifically those from comic books). Where is the "franchise" potential in a well-written, thought-provoking drama? There is none. You won't see those at your local theater when *Harry Potter and the Nobody Cares* is on 10 of the 20 screens.

In the 70s American movies were in their prime. Foreign films from master filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard and Reiner Werner Fassbinder inspired American youth. Those films were being made as art, completely different than what "Classic Hollywood" was doing at the time.

Some all-time great artists came out of this period of film: Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Robert Altman, Terrence Malick, and countless others. They were the "rebels," going against the very traditional style of filmmaking. They worked on location instead of on sets, with their friends instead of a real crew, making it up as they went. The result was arguably some of the greatest films ever made, starting with "Bonnie and Clyde" and "Easy Rider" in the late 60s and ending with "Raging Bull" in 1980.

Director Peter Bogdonovich (*Last Picture Show*) says that *Jaws* was the film that ruined it. *Jaws* was devastating to making artistic, smaller films. They forgot how to do it. They're no longer interested." Many people, including director Billy Friedkin blame *Star Wars*. "It was like when McDonald's got a foothold, the taste for good food just disappeared. We entered a period of devolution. Everything has gone backward toward a big sucking hole."

The 80s has been called the

worst decade of film in American history. The cheap quickie comedy became the norm. Studios produced comedy after comedy, many of them very similar to the last. Fortunately, the 90s brought back low-budget independent productions. Directors like Quentin Tarantino, Robert Rodriguez, Kevin Smith, Paul Thomas Anderson, and Richard Linklater gave us hope. While movie making still wasn't the haven for art and artistic expression it once was, its presence could be seen and felt.

However, these films soon died out because they weren't making enough money. Big-budgeted blockbusters became the money makers: all action with a poorly written story. Movies were made by directors hired to finish the film, not to express anything through it. Studio tools like Michael Bay (*Transformers*, *Pearl Harbor*) and Brett Ratner (the *Rush Hour* films, *X-Men 3*) turned out generic popcorn movies.

Another cash machine for Hollywood became the small-budgeted horror film—meaning rip-offs of an older horror film, remakes of a foreign horror film, and poorly written scripts. Hollywood told the American public "we know how to get you into the theater and how to make money off you with little effort," yet people still went. This is painfully obvious when

there is at least one horror film a month. When "PG-13" rated horror films are continuously aimed at teenagers who don't know better than to waste their money, there's a problem.

The rise of music videos has been no help. They leave little to the imagination and give people what they want: instant visual gratification. Hollywood knows that the "eye and ear candy" formula works. It connects with audiences who look for "fast-moving, something-happening" films. These elements take away the most artistic elements of films: the storytelling, the subtle visual images. Today's visual tornadoes make a slower film that is trying to say something less appealing to an audience that has been trained to expect immediate gratification.

While movie preference is subjective, most theater-goers can't tell the difference between a quality film and a cleverly disguised 90-minute commercial. Hollywood is relying on the dumbing-down of our youth to continue their record-setting weekends at the Box Office.

Until we tell Hollywood (with our ticket money) that we expect more than a special-effects extravaganza, we will seldom see quality in American film. With exposure comes knowledge. With knowledge comes appreciation of talent.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Senior trombonist, engineer, president juggles extracurriculars

CHELSEA MARKLE
staff writer

In his fourth year in Behrend's concert band, C.J. Burns is a dedicated bass trombone player.

Burns is a senior majoring in mechanical engineering. He has avidly played bass trombone since the fourth grade and has been in concert band since his freshman year.

Burns was a member of his pep band throughout high school. Burns' passion for music influenced his decision to participate in Behrend's musical programs, thus he was inspired to continue with his playing at the collegiate level. Currently, he is a member of the concert, jazz, pep, brass and percussion bands here at Behrend.

Burns wasn't immediately convinced he wanted to participate in band when he first arrived. The deciding factor for him was when his mom gave

him "that extra push," and he hasn't regretted it.

"I started my freshman year playing at commencement and I have been hooked on it ever since," said Burns.

Living off campus, he first found it difficult to manage both school and his extreme commitment to the band.

"Our director, Dr. Viebranz, is really understanding and easy to work with. School comes first," said Burns.

Not only is Burns a devoted member of the band, but he is also a member of The LEB and History Club. He is the president of Auto Club and was an orientation leader. After college, Burns plans on working for the bulletproof glass company, IBIS Tech, which specializes in presidential vehicles and Humvee armor.

"It would be a great opportunity and a respectful position," said Burns.



Daniel Smith / The Behrend Beacon

As a senior, Burns is gearing up to play his final tune with the concert and jazz bands next semester.

STUDENT BANDS

Student jams to own tune with Jetsam Blue

ASHLEY BEMIS
staff writer

Around Erie one can find many different types of bands from hardcore to jazz. However, one band, Jetsam Blue, is different.

They are a local "powerpop" band that plays all of their own music: over 25 original songs, with a few exceptions of some covers (including Katie Perry's "Hot and Cold"). The members of this band include Alan Dingfelder, Nathan Miller, Dan Cass, and Behrend's own Ryan Hoover. The band started about a year ago, but it wasn't until this summer when Hoover, the drummer, actually joined.

Hoover is the only member of Jetsam Blue who goes to Behrend. He is a freshman majoring in MIS. Because he attends college, the band only gets to practice one day a week. Thus, every Saturday is a non-stop rehearsal. Hoover says that balancing school and band is easy for him, though he has to keep his grades "up to par." Practice is cancelled otherwise.

Hoover's grades have not completely slipped, but he admits he has struggled in a few classes. By studying enough and managing his priorities he was able to catch up with his work.

"The name Jetsam Blue actually came about when Alan was

looking around on his computer and opened a notepad file which said 'Jetsam Blue,'" said Hoover. "So there is no actual meaning to the name and we are considering changing it soon [sic]."

Seeing as the band has vast array of original recordings, they have a CD entitled *Say One Thing*.

"We really aren't trying to go big right now," said Hoover. "It's more just for fun and laid back. Eventually the band may go big but I will probably not be involved then."

Hoover has been in many other bands, two of which in-

clude, The Intergalactic Experience and Control Z.

"I love being in bands, I think it's a blast!" Hoover says.

"One thing that stands out about [us] is that there is no screaming and [we're] go-happy guys," said Hoover. "We are able to play with any type of band because we are just looking to have a good time."

On Oct. 24 at 8 p.m., Jetsam Blue and a few other bands will be hosting a Halloween show titled "Nightmare at the Metropolitan," which will be held at the Metro nightclub.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

For a sample of Jetsam Blue's sound, visit their official website at www.myspace.com/jetsamblueofficial.

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