

ENTERTAINMENT

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"My mother never saw the irony in calling me a son-of-a-bitch."

- Jack Nicholson

Summer Film Festivals



By Kabir Viridi

School is out and the weather enjoyable. It is time to relax and enjoy life. On those overly hot nights, look no further than catching a film. Luckily, both UCI and the Orange County Performing Arts Center are having free film festivals.

The theme of the movies are extremely different. UCI has selected movies which are very "artsy" by nature and deal with serious modern social issues, with plenty of four-letter words used. The OCPAC has chosen to screen features with a much more uplifting feel-good nature in which entire families can enjoy.

The themes of the different series allow viewers to have diversity in stories, ideas and different flavors. You can sit back and escape reality with the movies at OCPAC. On the other hand, the films at UCI allow you to really focus on current societal issues in a different format from the norm of watching CNN or reading journals. Ultimately, both film series are captivating and refreshing because movies are a way to temporarily leave everyday life and be transported into another environment.

The few hundred audience members at UCI's indoor screenings are

mostly college students and adults looking for provoking intellectual stimulation. They are very different from OCPAC's 3,000 plus audience members, who gather in portable chairs at the outdoor community plaza to see high definition movies projected onto a 22-by-30-foot screen. The community members are comprised of a wide range of people from first-graders to grandparents.

There is audience interaction for both venues. UCI has audience discussion groups moderated by a UCI film grad student after the film with complimentary hot beverages and biscuits. It's amazing how much anyone can learn by attending these fascinating talks.

I was completely blown away by how many interesting tidbit details I missed out on which further helped to explain the intricate story lines in the films. Sometimes there can be heated exchange during these discussions, with people sharing personal stories and their own values as it relates to the modern issues of the film. It is so informative and great to see so many people of different demographics get together for these discussions and explore all the details of not only the movie of the night, but also to how it relates to the modern day we live in.

The OCPAC has a lively costume

contest where contestants dress up like central characters from that evening's chosen film to win some local community prizes. Before each film, the center shows a selection of the Best Animated Short Films from the Newport Beach Film Festival.

They have also offered fun-filled contests such as dressing as your favorite character for "The Wizard of Oz." Contestants have won a variety of prizes including free tickets to the OC Fair, tickets to see shows at the Center, gift baskets and cookies from Corner Bakery, picnic meals from Gelson's Markets and swag such as t-shirts, CDs and other goodies from musicals. They also had a performance by a cast member from "In the Heights." And for "Oliver!", the Center partnered with KCRW 89.9 to present the movie.

UCI's film series for the month of August is titled "As They Were Meant To Be Seen," and focuses on how something essentially vital from a movie can only be attained by watching it in the true movie theatre venue with others. The celluloid strips on the big screen really enhance the movie versus the other formats of popping in a DVD, watching it on YouTube or even on an iPod.

There are two movies from 1966: "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly" and "Andrei Rublev." One has a

western flavor while the other tells the story of a medieval Russian icon painter. There is also a silent movie from 1927 entitled "Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans," which was the co-winner of the Best Picture award at the very first Academy Awards. There is such diversity in this film series because it really allows people to get exposed to cinematic history with ground-breaking movies that are not really part of our mainstream culture.

UCI's films are very compelling, but cannot necessarily be classified as "fun" movies. They require a lot of intense concentration. There is also having to stomach some very graphically disturbing images like drug usage, as was seen in "Half Nelson."

The movies at OCPAC are more what summer is really about—just having a good time outdoors. It's still fun to travel down the yellow brick road in "The Wizard of Oz," or watch Marilyn Monroe illuminate the silver screen in "Some Like It Hot."

People should really come out and take advantage of both of these film series because there is nothing like these movies in the theaters showing the current hits of today. It is amazing how homogeneous today's movies will look after comparing them to the great films of yesteryear.

A PREVIEW OF THE OUTSIDE LANDS MUSIC FESTIVAL

EXCITEMENT: Several bands are making comebacks at the coveted San Francisco fest.

By Stephanie Vatz
Staff Writer

It seems like music festivals have become our generation's own coming of age ceremony with events like Coachella, Bonnaroo, Lollapalooza and others popping up all over the country. But now that Coachella has come and gone this year, California's summer event of choice has become Outside Lands, a cheaper (and colder) alternative in San Francisco.

Outside Lands separates itself from the other massive indie festivals by trying to incorporate all of the senses, not just the auditory.

It's taking care of the eyes with a wall of art, a garden featuring space monkeys by American artist Dalek, and the scenery itself within Golden Gate Park.

It pays homage to taste and smell with the 33 restaurants and 26 vineyards bringing wine to the event, and it is reaching out to touch on environmental problems with recycling programs, valet bike parking and an ocean clean-up.

But even with all those other attractions, Outside Lands places the most focus on the ears.

This year's lineup includes: My Morning Jacket, Gogol Bordello, Kings of Leon, Cat Power, Tokyo Police Club, Freelance Whales, Phoenix, Social Distortion, Nas and Damien Marley, Empire of the Sun, Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros, the Temper Trap and many others.

Perhaps the most exciting performers are The Strokes, who have been M.I.A. for almost 3 years, working on their own solo projects.

Now the band is back and only time will tell if they'll give us anything new to listen to until their new album, which is supposedly dropping in March. Either way, the classic guitar riffs, bass lines and sultry lyrics from the older Strokes albums are enough to tide anyone over.

The festival will provide an interesting contrast between the new breed of indie bands like Freelance Whales, and the once unknown but now superstar performers like The Strokes or Kings of Leon.

Although Kings of Leon have been getting crap lately (and literally) for cancelling a concert due to diarrhetic pigeons and their change in sound, they didn't seem too phased by the criticism when the New U got the opportunity to talk to the drummer, Nathan Followill.

As far as the pigeon situation goes, Followill joked that the band was "working with a company for a pigeon repellent spray" to use for future shows.

The change in sound problem is a bit different though. Fans have been insisting that Kings of Leon has not only gone mainstream, but also have become less musically complex, less lyrically interesting and just all around bad.

One thing that may have helped transform the old Kings of Leon into the new is the giant tour they went on with U2.

'WINGS OF LIBERTY' SOARS

SWARM: Blizzard scores with the anticipated sequel to one of the most popular strategy games of all time.

By Charles Lam

After over a decade of waiting, gamers worldwide were treated to the retail release of "Starcraft II: Wings of Liberty" for Mac and Windows on July 27. Launch parties and midnight releases were commonplace on college campuses and video game stores as people picked up what could be the most anticipated video game in recent memory.

Developed by Blizzard Entertainment at their Irvine campus, "Wings of Liberty" is set four years after "Starcraft: Brood Wars," the last game in the series. The single player campaign puts you back into the position of Jim Raynor, leader of rebel group Raynor's Raiders as you clash with two separate factions - the insectoid alien Zerg, led by Sarah Kerrigan, who has resurfaced after being inactive for four years, and the Terran Dominion, a deeply corrupt human empire led by Arcturus Mengsk.

Blizzard decided to take a different approach with "Wings of Liberty's" single player. In the first "Starcraft" and its expansion pack, the player has access to all three races — Terran, the resourceful humans, Zerg, insectoid aliens capable of massing giant armies, and the Protoss, technologically advanced aliens. Furthermore, the single player campaign was split into three separate parts, with each told from a different race's point of view.

"Starcraft II" is set to be the Terran story while two currently unnamed expansions will tell the story from the Zerg and Protoss perspectives. Prior to release, this garnered some criticism. There was fear that, with Blizzard's merger with Activision, Starcraft II would be milked for as much money as pos-

'ST. CLOUD' IS NO SAINT

SINFUL: Zac Efron's bare chest is apparently more important than his character's struggle with his dead brother.

By Belester Benitez

Walking into the movie theatre, I didn't know what to expect from "Charlie St. Cloud," an adaptation of the 2004 novel "The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud" by Ben Sherwood. Since the film is directed by Burr Steers ("How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days"), I knew I could expect something interesting.

Unfortunately for Steers, people seeking to learn the story of Charlie St. Cloud should stick to the novel.

We learn of Charlie St. Cloud (Zac Efron) and his brother Sam (Charlie Tahan) who have built an impenetrable bond centered around sailing and the Boston Red Sox. On the night after the two win a sailing competition, Charlie and Sam get in a car accident.

While Charlie survives through electrical resuscitation, Sam unfortunately dies. As he is left with the ability to communicate with his dead brother, Charlie finds himself



COURTESY OF BATTLE.NET

It's just another day in the online multiplayer world of "Starcraft II," where players attempt to utterly annihilate their opponents.

sible. These worries are unfounded, as the single player includes a total of 30 missions, just a few less than the original Starcraft.

The single player campaign has changed greatly from that of "Starcraft" in that missions are no longer linear. You can upgrade forces, and make other changes as well. The multiplayer format remains largely untouched.

Despite the graphics engine upgrade and the revision of each race's army lineup, the multiplayer plays almost exactly like "Starcraft." You and another player choose one of three races, and prepare to do battle.

The largest difference is that all games now take place over 'Battle.NET', Blizzard's online matchmaking service, which is a departure from earlier Blizzard games, when

games could take place either on Battle.NET or over a LAN connection.

While the game expects you to be up to date with the storyline, it will baby you into the control scheme. If you've played a "Real Time Strategy" game before (think "Age of Empires" or "Warcraft III"), you'll know the basics of game control.

In the simplest terms, you use workers to build a colony and gather resources. Then you mass an army of different units and send them to battle with your opponent's. "Starcraft II" makes no adjustments to the RTS formula. While the game play is fairly simple, it is diverse enough to spawn a fairly popular competitive scene, with several large tournaments taking place before the game was even

released.

Since the game is available on both Mac and Windows, players will be able to compete across platforms. There's no console incompatibility; Blizzard has taken the opportunity to craft a game perfect for the computer.

With requirements scaling back to bare bones, Starcraft II can be played on systems as old as 6 years. The graphics don't suffer at all when pumped up to the highest levels — individual blades of grass are blown in the wind, rocks tumble accurately after being blasted apart and the Zerg pulsate as they move around the map. The cinematics, while nowhere near cutting edge, are fine for their purpose.

Blizzard scored a flawless victory with their character design. The relationships and personalities are believable; the hero, Jim Raynor, is easy to sympathize with, while the main villain, Mengsk, is simple to hate. Sarah Kerrigan, the series' most complex and tragic character, is a ball of mixed emotions, leaving the player both hurt and angry at the same time. The voice acting is done perfectly, giving each character his or her own sense of identity.

Did Blizzard really deliver the perfect sequel? "Starcraft" was one of the best-selling PC games ever; it was so popular that professional leagues exist and games are televised in South Korea. Combine that with a decade-long wait time and expectations are through the roof.

Amazingly, Blizzard did it. Despite the lack of LAN play and worries about the single player, Blizzard made one of the best RTSs ever released better. The characters are more real, the game play is rock solid, and the story has more depth. The single player is engrossing and multiplayer is exciting. If you ever enjoyed an RTS, you are almost obligated to play "Starcraft II." It doesn't get any better than this.

OUR RATING:

★★★★★ 5/5

of us, or at least to those who like such subject matter. After that, the movie commits suicide when Charlie takes his shirt off in a very Jacob Black-ian manner. At least teenage girls are pleased.

Efron gives a fair acting performance. He fits the handsome, troubled young adult role well and does not over act. His best scene occurs in the ambulance when he learns that his brother Sam is dead. Efron portrays the grief successfully and makes it believable. When he is speaking to Sam, his acting is truly natural. The two make it work and the relationship comes off as genuine.

Tahan gives a great performance as Sam St. Cloud. Sam's admiration for his older brother is genuine and the audience truly feels the love that he has for his older brother.

Amanda Crew plays Tess, Charlie's love interest. Her acting is fine and she adequately portrays the unexpected but daring female role.

As always, Kim Basinger gives a solid performance as the mother of the St. Clouds. Ray Liotta seems to be the wrong actor to cast as the character who not only saves Charlie's life, but also steers him in the correct direction. He

does not come off as very emotional which is the point of his character.

Despite Steers's negligence to make the film heartfelt and emotional, he does create a very visually beautiful movie. Camera shots focus largely on the beautiful ocean and the refreshing woods. Even the graveyard was clean and gave off a feeling of comfort rather than fear.

On the other hand, the editing is terrible. It is inconsistent, which leads to confusion — one has to take a moment to figure out the movie while watching it.

Although the acting is commendable and visuals alluring, "Charlie St. Cloud" disappoints because it does not place predominance on the story, which is about Charlie's struggle after he is separated from his brother by death.

Steers focuses too much on making the movie appealing to the mainstream audience by utilizing plain humor and clichéd situations. Had he not been preoccupied with catering to the masses, "Charlie St. Cloud" would have been a much better film.

OUR RATING:

★★☆☆☆ 2/5

THE PRODIGIOUS 'INCEPTION'

DREAMLIKE: Brimming with originality, Christopher Nolan's latest science-fiction heist film is mesmerizing.

By Jun Im
Staff Writer

Nine years. That's how long it took director Christopher Nolan ("The Dark Knight") to develop his latest film for the big screen. Inspired by the experience of lucid dreaming and dream incubation, "Inception" is Nolan's most ambitious film to date, and is so far the most unique and rewarding film of the year.

Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) is a skilled extractor who steals ideas and secrets from people's subconscious minds in their dream state. A man racked with guilt, he longs to return to America and his children, but cannot due to his past and profession.

After a failed heist, Cobb is approached by Saito (Ken Watanabe), who offers him the chance to see his children again, in exchange for one last job. However, the task is no mere extraction; Saito wants Cobb and his team to carry out "inception," the extremely difficult process of planting an idea in the subconscious.

Even though Cobb and his associates carefully develop their plans for inception, nothing can prepare them for the unpredictable enemy who not only could jeopardize the whole mission, but also has a very special interest in Cobb himself.

At one point in the film, Cobb says to Ariadne (Ellen Page), "Never recreate places from your memory, always imagine new places." Indeed, such words perfectly describe "Inception" in comparison to the long list of summer's adaptations, reboots and remakes. What makes this film so unique is the



COURTESY OF WARNER BROTHERS

Joseph Gordon-Levitt coolly prepares to fight his adversary within a zero gravity subconscious.

originality behind it.

The film's exploration of dreams is truly captivating. The fact that we wake up when we die or fall in our dreams, that we don't remember the beginning of a dream — "Inception" fascinates the audience precisely because our experiences within our dreams are very similar to what the characters undergo in the film.

Aware of the complications that may arise due to the film's heavy subject matter, Nolan structures his film such that the viewer understands how inception works before it takes place. With that being said, the first half of the film is a tutorial for the audience to learn about the perfect crime, while the second half is presented for the audience to sit back and watch Cobb and his team performing that crime.

Of course, the film does become rather confusing, especially during the last half hour or so. Several events that occur will cause the

viewer to wish that Nolan had dedicated some more time to explain how and why such circumstances transpire.

One surprising thing about "Inception" is the absence of examining the morals and ethics of both extraction and inception. After all, Cobb explicitly states that what they do is "not strictly speaking legal." Even more surprising is the fact that Ariadne, who is supposed to be the film's moral compass, never questions the immorality of entering a person's subconscious, which is quite difficult to believe.

Despite the presence of a top-notch cast, Marion Cotillard and Cillian Murphy are the only ones who make an impression. With the exception of those two and DiCaprio, the rest of the cast deliver adequate performances due to the thin development of their characters.

As Cobb, DiCaprio is somewhat

subtle and only seems to meet the bare essentials for his character. Perhaps this is due to the fact that he played a very similar character in Martin Scorsese's "Shutter Island," so he did not want any comparisons made between Cobb and that character.

Cotillard steals her scenes due to the frightening aura she projects. Playing Cobb's late wife Mal, she not only nails the eerie side of her character, but shines in her emotional and vulnerable scenes as well.

Murphy plays Fischer, the heir to a business empire and the team's target. Fischer arguably has the more prominent emotional journey than Cobb, and Murphy is excellent at executing the right emotions, especially when sharing his scenes with Pete Postlethwaite, who portrays Fischer's dying father.

As stated before, the rest of the cast suffers from thin character

development that prevents them from showcasing their acting skills. How thin? The audience doesn't even know their character's motives for carrying out inception, save for Saito. Is it for money or glory for achieving what seems to be the impossible? It is not known.

However, they certainly make the best of what they have. Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Tom Hardy create laughs whenever they share a scene. Page serves as the guide for the viewer, but maintains the same expression on her face for most of the film. Watanabe's accent muddles his dialogue so much that the audience understands only half of his lines, though his demeanor is confident.

"Inception" boasts outstanding technical achievements. Cinematographer Wally Pfister's camerawork captures many stunning images, especially when coupled with slow-motion. At one point, editor Lee Smith juggles three action sequences and meshes them extremely well. The work of the sound editors and mixers exhibits their passion for every distinct crash, explosion and gunshot.

Composer Hans Zimmer's score fits the mood of each scene. In action scenes, the music goes through a series of allegros and crescendos. In sentimental scenes, adagios and decrescendos are prevalent.

The visual effects in "Inception" are spellbinding. A scene of a city folding upon itself and a zero-gravity hallway fight are enthralling. Indeed, the effects bring out the infinite possibilities of a dream.

"Inception" is unquestionably a film that cannot be missed. Though the film isn't Nolan's best work to date, its originality and scale are enough to make this a film worth experiencing.

OUR RATING:

★★★★☆ 4/5

A 'NIGHTMARE' THIS IS NOT

SOUND: Avenged Sevenfold delivers a superb album despite the death of their drummer.

By Abhay Malik

If you are an Avenged Sevenfold fan, you undoubtedly know of the tragic death of their iconic drummer, James "The Rev" Sullivan. His replacement is Mike Portnoy, of Dream Theater fame, who takes over the drums for the band's latest album, "Nightmare."

The Rev was a fantastic and talented drummer, and his drumming was an integral part of Avenged Sevenfold's sound. Needless to say, a great deal of anticipation was centered around how the music would sound without The Rev, and how Mike Portnoy would sound playing The Rev's parts on the album.

Portnoy's execution of The Rev's parts is just about as good as it gets, and after listening to "Nightmare," it's quite obvious why the band chose him. As for the drumming aspect of the record, Avenged Sevenfold made no mistakes. Additionally, the album is excellent in terms of the songwriting. The band's sound hasn't changed much. It's that well-known blend of grit and sinister melodies A7X are known for. They have achieved an extremely strong following with their sound, so there's certainly nothing wrong with it.

Synyster Gates and Zacky Vengeance both have their dissonant harmonies and powerful riffs, and M. Shadows' vocals are suitably gritty. Combined with Portnoy's spot-on drumming, A7X has managed to faithfully recreate all the key elements of their signature sound.

What gives the record extra meaning and oomph is that it is grounded on a particular, real emotion. The

album largely addresses the grief A7X felt over the loss of The Rev, and therefore deals with a certain set of issues, which gives the album that much more depth.

The opening title track, "Nightmare," begins with an eerie, chiming melody that quickly jumps into traditional Avenged Sevenfold wailing leads and thundering drums. M. Shadows' catchy vocals through the chorus are one of the high points of the song, and you'll soon find yourself humming along with him.

Starting off with a similar staccato-snare rhythm as A7X's own "Blinded in Chains," "Danger Line," the third track, quickly bursts into a lightning-fast attack. The song eventually moves into a piano outro with a power ballad-esque solo. It's here in the end of the song that you'll find one of the most powerful moments in the album. Shadows' lyrics, combined with the knowledge that they're remembering a fallen brother, are sure to hit home.

At the very least, the whistling at the end will give you goose bumps. You can truly feel the farewell they're giving to a beloved friend.

"God Hates Us" starts with a somber guitar intro. Not quiet for long, however—the band throws you into one of the angriest songs on the record. The verses push into a throbbing chorus in which Shadows bellows "God hates us all" over equally hypnotic and heavy guitars.

With its dark acoustic rhythm, sinister slide guitar leads, and Shadows' vocals, "Tonight the World Dies" comes across as half deranged score for a Western film and half dark ballad, a winning combination in the hands of A7X. The song is well placed between some unconventional work in the outro of "Victim" and "Fiction." In addition to its quirky eeriness, the track has passionately sung vocals which help to push the awesome A7X-ballad feeling.

"Fiction" starts off with a bel-

lowing, haunting piano that carries through the song. The beautiful melodies are played by The Rev himself, and some of the vocals on the track are sung by him as well. "Fiction" is undoubtedly one of the most powerful songs on the album, not only because The Rev is heard on it, but also because it is full of fantastic melodies and striking vocals that capture the listener.

"Nightmare" is a great album. It's Avenged Sevenfold through and through. The album has classic A7X elements that will attract every fan of the band, but what truly gives it an edge is that it addresses something powerful that the listener can truly feel through the songs. Even if you aren't a diehard A7X fan, something from the emotion in the tracks to the technical fervor with which the songs are executed will attract you.

OUR RATING:

★★★★★ 5/5

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"You know music obviously when you tour with anyone, whether it be intentionally or subconsciously, you're going to pick up from their sound, and the way they play their songs," Followill said, "You find yourself when it's time to go make another record or write other songs that you definitely, if nothing else then subconsciously, have that

in the back of your mind..."

"I think that definitely happened when we toured with U2," Followill continued. "I think the record we made after that definitely had a little more I guess arena-like sounds. Something that was definitely different than our low-fi records that we had done previously."

It is true that their sound has been a little more U2-sounding

lately. But hopefully this means that "Sex on Fire" won't suck as much in a concert setting as it does on the radio.

Another big name that will be performing is Gogul Bordello, a well-respected gypsy rock band from New York with a significant cult following.

Their fans and full-energy shows are about as legendary as the band itself, but this energy could be lack-

ing in an outdoor setting. This was addressed in our interview with singer Eugene Hutz.

"[We have] had experience in every kind of format from squats to outside to clubs to — I mean, art galleries," Hutz said. "It never seems to be getting in the way from our performance. And I think we pretty much feel comfortable in any of those settings and the energy is never a problem. I mean, I think

you can ask that from anybody who's seen us in any of those settings."

Only time will tell if Hutz is right. When Outside Lands 2010 arrives on Aug. 14, we will find out whether Gogul Bordello can bring their hysteric fans and energy to San Francisco, whether The Strokes still have it and whether Kings of Leon is still worth seeing live. Stay tuned for more coverage!