

ARTS & STYLE

New Decree Film Critic Looks at 'Dreamgirls,' 'The Queen'

By James Guy
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"Dreamgirls"

Director: Bill Condon
Distributor: Dreamworks SKG

After such disasters as "The Phantom of the Opera", "Rent", and "The Producers", "Dreamgirls" creates an engaging and lively story that makes the viewer believe what they are watching rather than simply accepting the irrational numbers past musicals have presented.

Writer and director Bill Condon garnered worthy praise for his flawless script of the 2002 film "Chicago," which landed him an Academy Award nomination as well as Writer's Guild nomination. Now Condon has proven once again he truly has a knack for making movie musicals, something most esteemed directors nowadays wouldn't even attempt.

With sharp editing, terrific camera work, and direction from someone who finally understands musicals, Condon has crafted a wonderful success in "Dreamgirls." An adaptation of the 1981 Broadway Musical, "Dreamgirls" tells the story of three female soul singers who quickly rise to fame and in turn become victims of love, hate, and greed. Starring Jamie Foxx, Beyonce Knowles, and Eddie Murphy, this new musical sets out to achieve what other current stage-to-screen films couldn't, to entertain.

Set in the 1960's, the film shows us the struggling trio known as the "Dreamettes" (Knowles, Rose, and Hudson) get their big break when asked to sing backup for the very charismatic James "Thunder" Early (Murphy) and their fame soon spirals into a world of deception and greed.

Beyonce Knowles shines as the headliner Deena Jones and earns deserving credit in her dramatic debut. Broadway star Anika Noni Rose is fantastic as the young, energetic Lorrell Robinson and Jennifer Hudson steals the show as Effie White, the most talented and most developed character of the trio. Hudson's performance of "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going" is by far one of the most powerful movie moments in the last few years. Eddie Murphy also gives the performance of his career as James Early, who easily delivers the most enjoyable moments of the film every time he takes the stage. Jamie Foxx, on the other hand, is, in a word, dull. His lack of enthusiasm slows down the film more than once but luckily the rest of the cast is able to regain our interest. Keith Robinson, Danny Glover, and Sharon Leal also give great performances which truly make the Screen Actors Guild Ensemble Award nomination well deserved.

"Dreamgirls" isn't perfect. There are plenty of moments when the film almost comes to a halt with slow songs or irrelevant storylines. But every time I had a negative feeling towards a certain scene, the scene or number that follows was always very entertaining. I have no doubt this film will be recognized in film editing, sound editing, costume design, and art decoration. But it is Jennifer Hudson's and Eddie Murphy's Oscar-worthy performances that make this film one of the best of the year.

Grade: B+

"The Queen"

Director: Stephen Frears
Distributor: Scott Rudin Productions

It is rare nowadays to see a movie that has been so universally praised live up to the reviews. Past films like "The Aviator", "Brokeback Mountain", and "Flags of Our Fathers" were all praised as the best film of the year, but quickly lost steam during the award season and failed at the end. That is not the case Stephen Frear's new masterpiece; Fueled by Helen Mirren's brilliant performance and a spectacularly written screenplay by Peter Morgan, "The Queen" comes off as a timeless gem.

The story is of England's Queen Elizabeth II (Mirren) in 1997 after the untimely death of Princess Diana, who was not in good graces with the royal family after her divorce with her son, Charles (Jennings). The newly elected Prime Minister Tony Blair (Sheen) becomes the beacon of support for the mourning nation after giving his famous "people's princess" speech that sky-rockets his approval ratings that makes him the father of England. Elizabeth, on the other hand, refuses to speak out publicly on Diana and show any sign of mourning, completely stunning Blair and the world. This decision, which she wholeheartedly believes is the correct thing to do, backfires and creates nationwide resentment towards her and the monarchy. Blair then takes it upon himself to mitigate the fiasco. Meanwhile the Queen tries to understand how the people's respect for her had so quickly shifted after Diana's death.

Helen Mirren gives the performance of the year as Elizabeth II, or as the credits so elegantly put it, as The Queen. Her subtle, yet powerful approach to her character makes Elizabeth a small yet extremely strong

figure that commands attention for every soft word spoken. Peter Morgan's script does a superb job in making the audience understand the importance that Elizabeth sees in herself. She's a woman past her time, who believes she has the same right to act as the early monarchs of England and to be treated like divine royalty, when in truth nowadays she is seen more as a respectable symbol of England's government.

Michael Sheen does a capable job as Tony Blair despite not looking anything like the real Blair. It is only in his more subtle times he seems more like the real Blair who is loud publicly but soft behind closed doors. The film

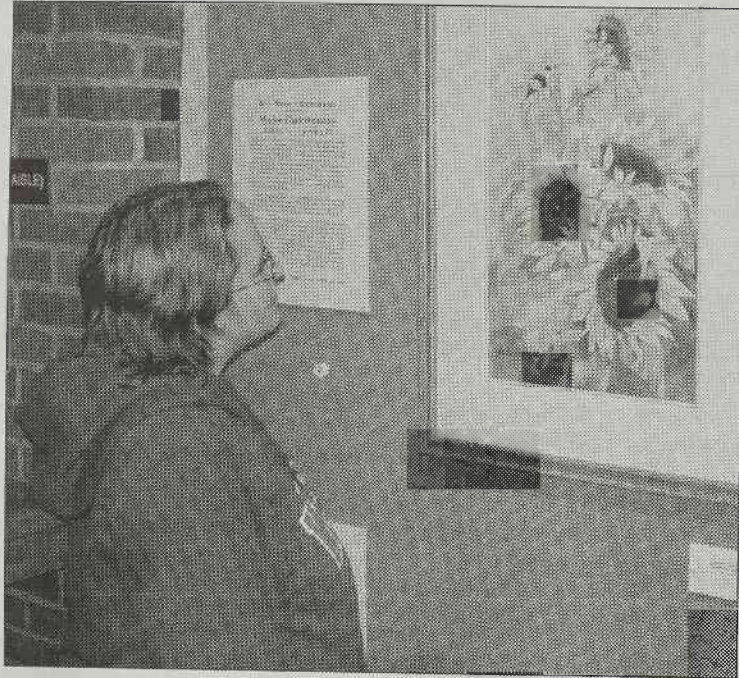
moves with a perfect pace that never loses the audience's attention, and as more time progresses the more engaged we become. Frears helps us during the turmoil when the queen's approval ratings were dramatically dropping to understand the reasons behind her decisions, which really helps us support the Queen more than we expect. It isn't until one huge outburst from Blair where in less than one minute the entire reason of her actions is put in perspective and leaves us with greater remorse than imagined.

Morgan's script helps us see this story in so many different perspectives that at the end we've experience every

emotion possible during this debacle. Frears also puts into great use a wonderful technique of filming the scenes with the queen with a crisp, clean picture while making those with Blair grainy and with almost no lighting.

Rarely does a movie of this magnitude come along that is so intelligent, moving, and insightful. "The Queen" delivers a timeless story of change in one person's mind after a lifetime of protocol. "The Queen" offers the performance in Helen Mirren and delivers an unmatched story of strength, tranquility, and pride that will last the test of time and go down as a timeless classic.

Grade: A+



Alisha Wilson examines "Summertime Sunflowers," a painting by Marion Clark Weathers. The artist's work will be on display at the Mims Gallery in the Dunn Center through February 25

'Train' Set to Run for Black History Month

The NC Wesleyan Theatre Department will stage "Freedom Train," by Marvin Gordon, on February 15, 16, and 17, as part of the college's Black History Month observance. The performance is set for the stage at the Dunn Center for the Performing Arts.

According to the theatre department's promotional literature, "Freedom Train" tells the story of Harriet Tubman - who was born a slave, but devoted her energies to freeing others - in a fascinating series of highly theatrical scenes - scenes that use dance, dialogue, mime, and music of the period. 'Freedom Train' is a story about self-sacrifice, dedication, and survival; it is also laced with warmth and a sense of humor that celebrates the human spirit...a universal story for all ages and all races."

Director Roger Drake has announced the following cast:

- HARRIETBrittany Richardson
- BEN.....Jonathan Rice
- RIT.....Nicole Louisius
- DAVID.....Malcolm Armwood
- WILLIAM HENRY.....Quinton Dixon
- MASTER BRODA.....James Guy
- OVERSEER.....Ian Gagnon
- MR. COOK.....Stuart Briscar
- JACOB.....James Guy
- THOMAS GARRETT.....Sean Riccio
- WILLIAM STILL.....Vainthe Julien
- PATROLLER.....Stuart Briscar
- GUARD I.....Joshua Cain
- GUARD II..... Keith Smith
- SENATOR.....James Guy
- JOHN BOWLEY.....Chris Deaver
- PATROL GUARD.....Sean Riccio
- MARY.....Tyeisha Hardy
- ALFRED.....Edward Phillips
- SAM.....William Boyd

Matthew Esterline's Top Ten Films of 2006

By Matthew Esterline
Decree Contributor

Welcome Back! With the close of 2006, I've attempted yet again to find something memorable out of a really crappy year in movies. Before I name the best and worst movies of 2006, let's go over the "Oscar" material. "The Queen" is boring, "Borat" is decent ("Jackass Number 2" was funnier), "Children of Men" is as pointless as its source material, "This Film is Not Yet Rated" is a good documentary, "Notes on a Scandal" is boring, "Letters from Iwo Jima" is okay, but slow, "Little Children" is weak, "The Pursuit of Happyness" sucks, "Blood Diamond" is slower than molasses (and sucks), and "United 93" and "World Trade Center" can go straight to hell. Honor, my ass. How about honoring my sacrifice of having to watch those two pieces of crap? Anyway, here are the best and the worst that 2006 had to offer. Some movies are good. Some are great. Most are bad. Enjoy!

The Best of 2006

10. "The Departed"/"The Last King of Scotland" (tie). Two overall crappy movies held together by two incredible lead performances. "The Departed" has some memorable kills, but it only holds up when DiCaprio is on the screen. Concerning the other film, why is a movie about Idi Amin focusing on another character? Forest Whitaker owns the movie. Too bad he's not in it that much. Who's winning the Oscar? I'm hoping for a tie.

9. "Perfume: The Story of a Murderer" - A great book has become a so-so 2006 movie. This book deals with a man's obsession over creating the perfect scent. It requires (duh) murder as the movie goes on and stranger and stranger ingredients are needed. The ending alone makes the movie worth seeing.

8. "The Good German" - A neat throwback to the days of crappy movie sets, poor lighting and sound, and subversive Communism, "The Good German" holds up thanks to good acting and an amazing effort to recreate the feel of old Hollywood. A helpful dose of modern film cursing and nudity help the overall effect of the film. Also, this movie had some of the best beatings on film this year.

7. "Scoop" - Another year, another great Woody Allen movie that no one will see. A journalist is told, by a ghost, about a serial killer operating in London. She decides to try to break the story before anyone else. Half "Mighty Aphrodite", half "Manhattan Murder Mystery", "Scoop" holds up as a solid comedy.

6. "The King" - This year's "The Talented Mr. Ripley", "The King" is a unique and disturbing movie about one man's attempt to connect with his father. With out-of-nowhere kills that actually got a gasp out of me, as well as some great camera work, this movie is the real hidden gem of 2006.

5. "Marie Antoinette" - This movie got some undeserved flack. I

don't know why, because this movie hits all the right notes. A throwback to older period dramas and 80s movies—if that's possible—"Marie Antoinette" is an overlooked movie that had some great performances. Two words: Rip Torn.

4. "Manderlay" - Another overlooked film, "Manderlay" has just the right amount of controversy to piss everybody off. A sequel to 2003's crappy "Dogville", "Manderlay" focuses on Grace (the ever-stupid American) and her attempts to help southern sharecroppers. When her help is neither wanted nor appreciated, her frustration grows into a murderous rage. Both separate and connected to "Dogville", "Manderlay" proves to be the stronger and more memorable film.

3. "The Fountain" - The best date movie of 2006. Stop laughing... I'm serious. This movie deals with one man's attempts to save his ill wife, and her attempts to prepare him for her death. Both sad and seemingly undecipherable, "The Fountain" will give you something interesting and meaningful, for once, to talk about with your significant other.

2. "Hollywoodland" - Talk about unappreciated. This movie has perfect directing, writing, and acting, and no one seems to want to recognize it for the near perfect film it is. I love this movie. Ben Affleck—yes, that Ben Affleck—deserves the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his portrayal of doomed Superman actor George Reeves. Adrien Brody, the star of the movie, is also fantastic. Great movie.

1. "The Proposition" - My favorite film of 2006 is a foreign movie. Sure it's Australian, but it counts. This soon to be cult western has a simple plot. An outlaw has to kill his murderous older brother in order to prevent the execution of his innocent younger brother. With dialogue straight out of John Ford or Sam Peckinpah films and a generous amount of violence, "The Proposition" is the movie to beat in 2006.

The Worst of 2006

- 10. "Casino Royale" - Is it that hard to make a good Bond film?
- 9. "V for Vendetta" - Preachy.
- 8. "The Good Shepherd" - Arty.
- 7. "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby" - Dopey.
- 6. "Night at the Museum" - It's hard to believe that Ben Stiller used to be a good actor.
- 5. "Basic Instinct 2" - Droopy, Saggy, Leathery...and Unnecessary.
- 4. "Running with Scissors" - Burn every copy. Now.
- 3. "An American Haunting" - Molestation and ghosts. A great combo.
- 2. "Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story" - A giant disappointment.
- 1. "The Black Dahlia" - Worst movie of the Decade (I'm calling it now).

GIRLS AND SPORTS

