

Movie Reviews

'Lean On Me' examines Clark, today's society

By **ANDREW LAWLER**
Staff Writer

It's 1987 and Eastside High School in Paterson, N.J. is a cauldron of violence. Drug deals are conducted openly and teachers are beaten and molested in scenes more reminiscent of a gang movie than of a school. Two-thirds of the students cannot pass the state's minimum basic skills test.

Into this chaos strides "Crazy" Joe Clark. Acting more like the new sheriff in town than the newly appointed principal he is, Clark and about 20 security guards take quick steps to bring the school under control. Discovering the worst offenders in the school, he expels all 300 of them. He enforces an almost military discipline, alienating teachers, unions and parents along the way. When an expelled student, who is a drug dealer, is let in by another student, Clark locks all the doors with chains. Some outraged parents demand that Clark be fired, citing

his criminal methods of education. Yet Clark begins to make a difference.

Such is the fact-based story of "Lean On Me," directed by John Avildsen: a powerful and often moving account of one man's efforts to turn a school around. The film is inspirational (as one would expect from a film by the director of "Rocky" and "The Karate Kid"). Yet it gratifyingly rises above the simplistic (unlike "Rocky" and "The Karate Kid").

The film asks tough questions: how far can or must we go to educate our children? Can we justify a prison atmosphere in our schools? The questions are as controversial as Clark himself.

The film, to its credit, doesn't try to come up with a simple answer to such questions. Rather, it shows us what can work in such a situation, and leaves it to us to decide if it was appropriate.

The problems affecting this school do not disappear in a rose-

colored haze when Clark appears as the school's savior. Students still face the problems of drugs and poverty. Even the goal Clark seeks is disturbing — to get high school students to pass a basic skills test that proves only minimum literacy in math and reading. This is the very least we would expect from a high school. Yet it is an important and necessary first step, and a significant achievement.

Morgan Freeman portrays Clark in a performance that should, but probably won't, earn him an Academy Award nomination. Freeman resists the impulse to make Clark a misunderstood saint. Instead, he shows us a man whose personality is as radical as his methods. Clark is a tyrant, a zealot who allows no disagreement with his ideas no matter how arbitrary or unreasonable they may seem. This is a man who publicly humiliates the same people that are trying to help him. Freeman brings a complicated man to life in all his complexity, presenting us with the whole man, not just the public hero (or villain).

All of the other performances are as good. Robert Guillaume

surprises in his portrayal of Dr. Napier, Clark's friend and boss. Guillaume is convincing as the man who has to deal with the whirlwind created by Clark's actions. His performance is much more understated and simple than what we are used to seeing him in. He provides an excellent foil to Clark's explosive martinet as he alternately shields Clark and berates him.

Beverly Todd is similarly good as the vice principal. It is her character who most often has to face the brunt of bad feeling, not just Clark's but the teachers' also. Her growing frustration and eventual verbal explosion are well measured and believable. It is she who asks the questions that need to be asked about Clark's methods. Is it right to step on others if your goal is good? She allows Clark to recognize some of his faults and grow a little.

The other performances are notable. The legion of young black and Hispanic actors in the film acquit themselves extremely well. Particularly good performances are the characters Kinesha and Samms. Kinesha is a bright girl who

seems to typify all the problems of the ghetto. Her mother looks barely older than she is, her father is non-existent. Yet with Clark's inspiration, she perseveres. The actress succeeds in making the tragedy of poverty a human tragedy, one that is immediate but surmountable. She never asks for your pity, just for some help.

Samms is one of the 300 troublemakers who were expelled. He begs to be let back in and Clark grudgingly allows him back. Clark's efforts to reform the school are mirrored in his efforts to reform Samms. Whenever Samms errs, Clark is there to bawl him out and urge him to better his efforts. Clark's failures and successes with Samms symbolize his attempts to put pride and discipline back in Eastside.

"Lean on Me" is a touching, often hilarious movie. It manages to inspire without turning insipid. It addresses important problems in our society and shows they can be attacked with success, if dedication and commitment are there. But the film never neglects to question whether the methods sometimes needed to arrive there are justifiable.

WXYC Top 20 Albums

ARTIST

1. Elvis Costello
2. Proclaimers
3. The Connells
4. XTC
5. Indigo Girls
6. Full Fathom Five
7. Miracle Legion
8. Love Tractor
9. De La Soul
10. Wonderstuff
11. Hugo Largo
12. Lyle Lovett
13. Christmas
14. Buck Pets
15. Sneetches
16. Various Artists
17. Black Sun Ensemble
18. Tommy Keene
19. Guadalcanal Diary
20. Throwing Muses

ALBUM

1. Spike
2. Sunshine on Leith
3. Fun and Games
4. Oranges and Lemons
5. Indigo Girls
6. Four A.M.
7. Me and Mr. Roy
8. Themes from Venus
9. 3 Feet High and Rising
10. Eight Legged Groove Machine
11. Mettle
12. And His Large Band
13. Ultra Prophets of the Psykick Revolution
14. Buck Pets
15. Sometimes That's All We Have
16. Pay it All Back, Vol. 2
17. Lambert Pass
18. Based on Happy Times
19. Flip Flop
20. Hunk Papa

Stay Awake: Today's musicians perform yesterday's Disney tunes

By **BRYAN BURNS**
Staff Writer

Stay Awake is a compilation album of various artists performing songs from classic Walt Disney movies. The album is produced by Hal Willner, who has made a name for himself by specializing in tribute albums like this. *Stay Awake* features songs that are not only from the greatest animated features, but are now performed in an incredible diversity of styles.

I'll admit, some of the songs on the album are what you think of when someone says Disney. For example, "Little April Showers," from *Bambi* is a round of happy voices, woodwinds and harps that conjure the image of cute forest animals playing in the spring rain. On the other hand, some of the classic tunes are twisted almost beyond recognition. "Heigh Ho," the dwarves' jolly work song, is given an eerie sound by the background of mining noises and the gravelly voice of Tom Waits.

To emphasize the diversity of music styles, Willner has arranged the pieces into an eclectic order. For example, the third medley on the album, "Three Inches is Such a Wretched Height," is a combination of latin swing and opera. "Castle in Spain" is performed by Buster Poindexter and the Ban-shees of Blue, followed by *Sleeping Beauty's* "I Wonder" by Yma Sumac accompanied by a full orchestra.

Poindexter's villainous voice and lyrics of a decadent, criminal life contrast sharply with the hopeful phrases of Sumac's aria, yet the two cuts fit nicely into the medley. "Castle in Spain" is full of Spanish trumpet riffs and has a full brass sound; it's arranged by the Uptown Horns, who travel frequently with bands and have appeared on "Late Night with David Letterman."

Many songs on the album are just given a modern pop-rock touch and an exciting performance by current groups, and these are surely the most fun. For example, "I Wanna Be Like You," sung by King Lou the chimp in *Jungle Book*, is a soulful mix by Los Lobos. It features their expected guitar and percussion, with the voice of Cesar Rosas and a lead baritone sax. "Whistle While You Work" is also given a pop beat by NRBQ. The gentle voice of Terry Adams leads this song, with a touch of whistling (although it's not quite the same as Snow White's). The Replacements also give a new sound to "Cruella DeVille," a song dedicated to the evil villainess of *101 Dalmatians*. This group gives the song a rock-funk edge and it sounds as if it were recorded at a wild party.

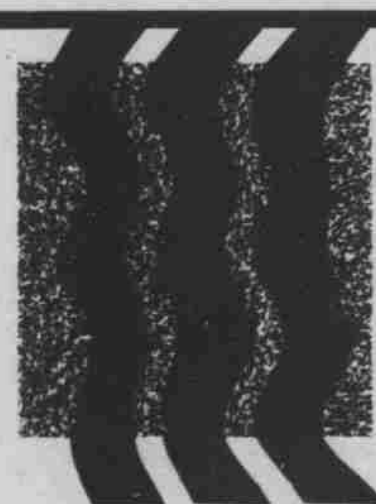
There are also songs on *Stay Awake* that get another type of adaptation. For example, "I'm Wishing," from *Snow White* is

turned into a jazz ballad performed by Betty Carter. And "Blue Shadows on the Trail," from *Melody Time* is given a modern country feel.

The song that best fits the classic Disney feeling is "When You Wish Upon a Star," sung by Ringo Starr with trumpet soloist Herb Alpert. Another laid-back tune is by one of UNC's most talked-about alumni, James Taylor, who sings "Second Star from the Right," from *Peter Pan*.

All of these tunes add up to a true representation of the Disney animated films. Although not from a movie, Willner realized that this album would not be complete without the "Mickey Mouse March," performed by Aaron Neville. But there are a few other songs that should also have been included. There are no songs from *Lady and the Tramp* and the best Disney song of all, "The Bare (Bear) Necessities," was left out.

Aside from these slight omissions, the album is great. With so many styles of music, everyone is sure to find something they like. And although it isn't a record you can throw on at a party and let it play, there are some rockin' tunes. "Stay Awake" is a true diversity of music, artists and movies which add up to the Disney feeling. So even if Walt is frozen, his movies and music live on.



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