

# Surprise: 'Birthday Girl' pleases

**Andi Petrini**  
Reporter

In the Nicole Kidman movie "Birthday Girl," the cast graces the screen with ironic comedy and artistic expressions.

The movie is a far cry from Hollywood's predictable romantic comedies. Its understated humor and excellent acting make "Birthday Girl" a refreshing experience.

The plot focuses on a British bank clerk, John Buckingham (Ben Chaplin), who orders a Russian bride named Nadia (Kidman) from an Web site. As soon as his new bride moves in with him, his uneventful life endures countless surprises.

A language barrier confronts Nadia and John, and the first 45 minutes of the movie are awkward for the viewer to watch. John gives Nadia an English-Russian dictionary one afternoon, and she shows him the pornographic magazines she found while snooping in his closet. After this key scene, their relationship focuses on sex.

The two live blissfully until Nadia tells John it's her birthday. The day is met by

the arrival of her cousin, Yuri (Vincent Cassel), and his friend, Alexei (Mathieu Kassovitz), from Russia. Nadia and John's relationship soon twists, and provid-

she can portray virtually any character. Cassel and Kassovitz, both French actors, turn in fine performances as the "good" Russian and "bad" Russian as the



Miramax/KRT

Ben Chaplin and Nicole Kidman play a British banker and a mail-order bride in the unusual romantic comedy, "Birthday Girl."

ing viewers with enough comedy and drama to keep them hooked.

The most impressive part of "Birthday Girl" is the unusual turns in the plot. Chaplin's role helps make "Birthday Girl" British comedy at its best.

Kidman had to learn to speak Russian for the role, and does it almost flawlessly. She proves once again that

story unfolds.

"Birthday Girl" was written by Jez and Tom Butterworth; Jez Butterworth also directed the movie.

Although he has previously directed just one film, Butterworth's use of rear-view mirror shots and close-ups gave the viewer a glimpse into the intense feelings of the characters and adds to the art of the film.

# Cracker—old dogs, no new tricks

**Samiha Khanna**  
A&E Editor

Cracker released its first album of original material since 1998, "Forever," last week. It's too bad the band's shining rock appeal could not have lasted this long.

The comeback's opening track, "Brides of Neptune," holds the most promise as a successful single. Singer David Lowery's Tom Petty-esque vocals and a dreamy organ part are magnetic, but the album fails to hold attention, presenting multiple songs with a four-four time signature.

Cracker is also limited by the appearance of the Hammond B-3 organ on every track, which takes the listener back to Counting Crows' 1993 release "August and Everything After."

A jazzy piano accompaniment covers the organ on the sassier track "Bring Us Down," which has shoestring reminders of Neil Diamond's famous "Sweet Caroline" laced within it.

A cello and violin duet at the start of the odd "Guarded by Monkeys"

sounds like it came right off the gorgeous soundtrack to "Requiem for a Dream." The song soon delves into a



faster, heavily-distorted guitar riff. The combination of these elements is a step in the right direction, but not the leap the album needs.

"Miss Santa Cruz Country" has an unexpected pop appeal with a high-pitched, four-note hook and a harmonica, but the annoyingly repetitive, unoriginal lyrics drown out its potential.

"Superfan" is the farthest Cracker strays from its decade-old sound. Starting with a pleasing skittering beat and Eastern-influenced organs and chimes, it quickly and painfully dips into monotonous vocals by guitarist Johnny Hickman. His limited range is reminiscent of STP

singer Scott Weiland's solo album, recorded while he was fighting a heroin addiction and decided he would take up singing in falsetto.

"Sweet Magdalena of My Misfortune" is a drawn-out, simply-constructed tune featuring Lowery's trademark gravelly vocals and guitar solos that appear on several previous Cracker albums. The charm of this track mirrors that of the band's hit "Eurotrash Girl," but ruefully lacks the precise lyrical genius of which Lowery and his comrades were once capable.

The soulful "Shameless" marks a slower tempo that is laden with luscious background vocals that truly stand apart from the rest of the album.

Despite a few shiny moments, the best thing "Forever" has to offer is the talent of new bassist and vocalist Brandy Wood. Her smoky vocals would put her in the good graces of Sheryl Crow fans.

Wood may have more luck in the solo career that she is simultaneously pursuing.

## CAMPUS CANDIDS

What CD can you listen to from start to finish without getting sick of it?



"Pink Floyd—Pulse. I've listened to them since I was little. It's kind of comforting."

—HILLARY SHERMAN, SENIOR



"Cast Iron Fitler—Further Down the Line. It sums up college life in a nutshell."

—BEN SLIZEWSKI, SOPHOMORE



"Alicia Keys—Songs in A Minor. Her vocals are so original. The beats are exactly my taste."

—DEANNA DALY, SOPHOMORE



"Jay-Z—Blueprint. It's definitely one of his best albums, if not the best."

—LAWRENCE CHETTY, FRESHMAN

## LINES TO LIVE BY

“When news becomes gossip  
And the hounds begin  
The rich man's inspiration  
Becomes the beggar's greed  
And there's no to stop it  
servicing the need  
'Cos the scared cry out  
They possess an everlasting grief”

—the living end  
“blood on your hands”  
roll on

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