

Antz: six legs, two antennae, zero inspiration

TORY HOKE
Features Editor

Before I address the quality of the beautiful but disappointing *Antz*, permit me to wonder aloud as to what defines a mature theme. I suspect that this film, which carries a PG rating despite themes of drunk driving, decapitation, war, torture and genocide, would have swiftly ascended to R with the addition of any sexual innuendo, which is notably absent. May I also wonder why the screening I attended featured a trailer for Pixar's competing ant tale *A Bug's Life* instead of Dreamworks' *Prince of Egypt*? The mind boggles.

I am sorry to report that *Antz*, Dreamworks' first animated release after a paltry two years in the making, is hardly worth the trouble. For all its visual freshness, *Antz* does not feature even one fresh idea. There is a madman who raves that the truth is out there until he is dragged off by authorities. There is a battle sequence lifted intact from *Starship Troopers*. There is a plucky

royal female who wants a whole new part of your world just around the river bend. There is a reluctant kidnapper and his nagging kidnappee. There is a member of the royal court who plots to kill the doddering monarch and marry the princess. There is the villain's henchman who has a last minute change of heart. There is a vague and dippy happy ending which fails to explain how the central conflicts will be resolved. It's a big heap of something, and I don't think it's ants.

This film can't even decide what it wants to be. It's a sequel to *Annie Hall*, it's a standard Disney formula, it's a war flick, and it's a pitch black comedy. I'm still reeling from Woody Allen as protagonist ant Z bidding farewell to a disembodied head. Voiced by Danny Glover. Whose character's name is Briefly Appearing Token Black Guy. Well, not exactly, but from his first appearance the smell of death clings to him so closely you try not to get too attached.

All the celebrity voices are admirably well-contributed, although voice characterization is Hollywood's golden fleece, meaning even the biggest names will vie for the work. Allen's New York neuroses schtick accounts for half the film's laughs ("I've never been able to lift more than 10 times my body weight," he confesses to his therapist), and Sharon Stone's Princess Bala would be pleasingly strong-willed if the script didn't make her so annoying. Christopher Walken's Colonel is nicely lubricious even if his character design absolutely reeks of Scar from *The Lion King*. Dan Aykroyd and Jane Curtin are a scream as a snobbish WASP couple until she dies onscreen in a death that is played for laughs but nonetheless permanent. Anne Bancroft does a disappearing act as the bland birthing queen; apparently there are no good roles for mature actresses anywhere.

As for educational value, the movie displays a blatant disre-

gard for biology. While a viewer might allow for a coed ant population in order to help the plot (the working populations of real ant colonies are entirely female) and for the omission of wings from the male ants, (a lone male ant does have wings.) The film establishes early that the career assigned to a larvae is arbitrary (the gurgling larvae are an uncommon stroke of genius). Yet the soldier ants are distinct from the worker ants. Losing this distinction would have made it funny for the identical ants to never consider that they could swap jobs. As it is, the chance for funny is as lost as the ants' attempt to overthrow their Stalinist government with a Marxist revolution. Plus the ants' pupils don't react to light. And the ants are erect, even when fleeing, so they move like *Xena's* lame centaurs. And they dance funny, even when they're not trying to.

Antz does succeed wildly with its visuals. The rendering of light, texture and movement is flawless and astonishing; the

insects frequently look like puppets. When Z and Bala have a commercial *Honey I Shrank* moment, the animators exaggerate speed and the length of the human's legs to make the sequence exhilarating. When the two find Insectopia, the animators find romance in a low-flying flock of green-bottle flies and the reflective surface of a piece of plastic. Here, Z makes a snow angel in the powdered-sugar surface of a doughnut, his antennae scraping out the halo. The red-eyed stoner bugs found in Insectopia are on the screen too briefly. The final scene reveals what everyday items are the ants' immense landmarks; it's witty, it's clever, and it's too little, too late.

Antz (PG)
Woody Allen, Sharon Stone, Gene Hackman
Dreamworks



Polly Jean Harvey back, asks fans, *Is This Desire?*

ASHLYNN BROWNING
Staff Writer

P.J. Harvey's long-awaited new album, *Is This Desire?* from Island Records, should satisfy fans who have been hungry for more ever since the 1995 release of *To Bring You My Love*.

After a three year hiatus from solo work, Harvey has redirected her attention from a host of side projects to focus

on this new album, which is a super-emotionally-charged look at love in all its veiled forms.

Band members Rob Ellis, John Parish, Eric Drew Feldman, Joe Gore and Mark Harvey provide the musical backdrop to Harvey's lyrics, which are delivered with exciting variety, sometimes through a growl and sometimes through a sexy whisper.

Is This Desire? can't quite be called a concept album for no coherent story is told, but the same pervasive emotions of longing, yearning, passion and pain haunt each song. Lyrical imagery, which Harvey has a real gift for creating, plays a strong role also in developing the atmospheric feel of this album.

Influences from electronica music, synthetic drums and

collaboration with musical artist Tricky give *Is This Desire?* an element of surprise that goes over very well.

Harvey's characteristically raw vocals are honed on this album, and there are plenty of areas of softness to contrast the forceful screams.

This album is a piece of work worth the wait, and may well be the culmination thus far of Harvey's talents. Look

for her on *The Tonight Show* on Oct. 14 for more discussion of *Is This Desire?*

Is this Desire?

P. J. Harvey
Warner Brothers



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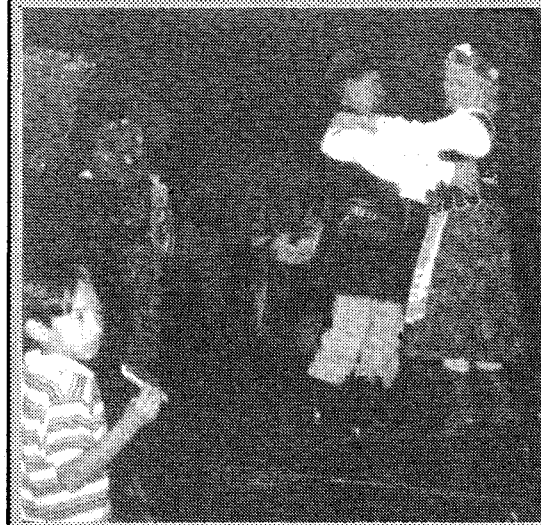
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International festival brings crowds



The flavors and costumes of many nationalities danced through the Raleigh Convention Center last weekend during the 13th annual International Festival.

Each participant country had a booth at the food court, so attendants could sample food from all around the globe. Countries also set up booths displaying native artwork and wares. On the main stage, representatives (left, Polish dancers) honored their respective countries with native dancing.

PHOTO BY BETH HALL