

# Kilmer, silly 'Saint' saved by direction

The road to attempt to craft, nay, to force Val Kilmer from "Real Genius," A-list supporting actor and B-list leading man into a bona fide megastar has been a long and winding one. The latest effort, "The Saint," finds Kilmer as the slippery and enigmatic Simon Templar, another one of those noble thieves planning to retire when they finally achieve their modest nest egg (in this case, a mere \$50 million).

Directed by that other talented Australian import, Phillip Noyce ("Patriot Games"), "The Saint" starts off promisingly enough. A nicely filmed heist scene, aided by spinning, noirish techno beats and fantastic tracking shots, has a plotted kinetic feel to it, and one would be forgiven for believing that a thinking man's action was on the way. While a few later scenes come up roses, the rest of "The Saint" never quite matches its introductory caper; it's still a very slick affair, but one that really does not add up to the sum of its parts.

Delving into his bag o' accents and donning almost a dozen different wigs and disguises — including one that makes him look like the bastard offspring of John Malkovich and Mr. Ed — Kilmer plays Templar as a sort of good bad guy, a high-tech crook with a

heart of gold. The problem is that the childhood flashback that opens the film, the single scene supposed to give some sort of objective explanation as to his entire lifestyle, comes off as a cheap, bizarre and hokey exercise in banality, the sort of story Templar might concoct were he caught and broken down for questioning by Interpol.

Elisabeth Shue ("Leaving Las Vegas") co-stars as Dr. Emma Russell, a comely nuclear energy expert who cracks the pesky mystery of cold fusion and makes science fun by storing her notes in her bra. The plot? Well, there's some mess about a shortage of fuel for heat; thousands freeze and die and, proving that a long December in chilly Moscow isn't quite as fun as it is state-side, civil unrest follows.

Enter Ivan Tretiak (Rade Serbedzija), equal parts nationalist and opportunist, whose overwhelming ambition is to crown himself the first czar of a new Russian Empire. This, of course, means that he earnestly uses the phrase "motherland" and repeatedly says things like "Friends, countrymen... Russians!" Forgive me if I chuckle a wee bit while the assembled movie crowd roars rock concert-style. As Tretiak's thug son Ilya, Valery Nikolaev rounds out the main cast, essentially playing the thankless "blue balls" gangster wannabe, continually and futilely chasing both Templar and Russell all over Moscow, all the



Elisabeth Shue plays a spy with Val Kilmer in "The Saint," an adapted thriller that features, yes, Russian villains and laptop computer technology.

while unnecessarily twirling a cane.

Noyce isn't given a great deal to work with; based on a series of old novels by Leslie Charteris and a 1960s British television series starring ex-Mr. Bond Roger Moore, "The Saint" is one of those Americanized adapted spy thrillers where the plot is so laughably, insanelly complex, full of tenuous connections and sketchy villainous motives, that the only true or original thrills lie in the cool gadgets and visual elements of the movie. Thus, the degree to which the film is able to succeed — despite its lingering ludicrousness — is largely due to Noyce, whose able direction helps "The Saint" find its heart.

In reviewing a film, I try not to get too caught up in pre-release buzz. But with "The Saint" I admit I harbored feelings of trepidation based on the theatrical previews. My opinion? If you can't stitch together a compelling trailer,

how good can the film be? There are exceptions to my rule of thumb — last summer's solid "Courage Under Fire" couldn't adequately convey its cerebral-quality drama in its ads — but for the most part I've found my theory correct. "The Saint" proved to be another, albeit slightly more minor, pleasant exception.

I am, therefore, somewhat torn on whether or not to recommend "The Saint." It's not great or even exceptionally memorable. And quite obvious hopes for a franchise may be a bit premature — despite Kilmer's fairly engaging performance, the story loop of "The Saint" is closed in such a manner that a sequel would undermine the credibility of the first film and thus Kilmer's characterization as a whole. But despite its numerous shortcomings, I must give a few props where props are due: this "Saint" is entertaining and manages to work better than I ever thought it could.

# Posthumous B.I.G. disc insures 'life after death'

Ah, spring. That time of year when flowers bloom, the grass grows green, and most importantly, the good hip-hop records are released. Notorious B.I.G.'s sophomore release *Life After Death* follows through on the promise of his debut insuring that a slightly late thaw nonetheless indicates a revitalization of hip-hop in 1997. Some of his east coast compatriots, in particular Camp Lo, further propogate the soil out of which a new and more relevant music can flourish.

*Life After Death* seems oddly prophetic after Biggie's murder last month, but the music, which is produced by such high-profile engineers as DJ Premier, the RZA, and "Puffy" Combs, ensures that the legacy of his talent will live on. On *Ready To Die*, B.I.G.'s rage could be felt on every track; on "Things Done Changed" and "Gimme The Loot" his bitter, mumbled lyrics burn the violent imagery into the listener's mind. On this outing, after several years of popularity and affluence, Biggie seems to have relaxed a little. Think of *Life After Death* as the "Carlito's Way" to *Ready To Die's* "Scarface" — the venom of his lean years has faded into memory and all that remains is the muted posturing of a long-in-the-tooth gangster.

"Hypnotize," the first single, borrows a melody from Slick Rick's "La Di Da Di" and bumps along on that thin line between pop accessibility and pure gangsta-lean without falling too far either way, and is followed by "Kick In The Door," a track which unites the bouncy, head-nod provoking beats of Premier and Biggie's laid-back rhymes. "#!\*@ You Tonight" is anchored by an unusually lightweight performance from B.I.G., but R. Kelly's smooth chorus makes the song soar despite conveying a message that would come across as lecherous with a less gentle touch.

"What's Beef?" postures the heavy one as the armchair-leaning, favor-granting central character from the "Godfather" saga, while "Mo Money Mo Problems" rocks along vibrantly on its sample and benefits from some lively performances from Mase and Puff Daddy. The best track on the entire release, "I Got A Story To Tell," sounds uncharacteristic of Buck Wild's usually beat-heavy production, but the tinge of guitar complements B.I.G.'s ode to friendship.

Despite my own prejudice against the B.O.N.E. Thugs, "Notorious Thugs" actually weighs in as one of the stronger tracks on the second disc, with Biggie doing his own version of the Bone's staccato lyricism engagingly. "Miss U" is a particularly compelling track, with rich harmonies weaving in and out of the vocals, but "Another," which features the irrepressible Lil' Kim, is a throwback to mid-eighties Bar-Kays and tells of searching for a new lover after the current one has gone astray. "Nasty Boy" and "Sky's the Limit," the latter of which is waiting for a soundtrack appearance, serve as prologues to the Too Short-assisted "The World is Filled..." which is almost too songs for its own good. The last two songs, the RZA-produced "Long Kiss Goodnight" and "You're Nobody (Til Somebody Kills You)" lay before the viewer a barren landscape of suicidal tendencies and the resignation that death is sadly a part of everyday life for the street hustler. *Life After Death* proves that an artist's work can embody his life and lifestyle.

Any album that has a title based on a Sidney Poitier film and features a cover taken from Marvin Gaye's *I Want You* would be intriguing, but few can hold interest with music that matches the feel of a sweaty disco on a Saturday night. Camp Lo's debut is rife with horn samples, funky bass lines and melodies that would make Shaft shake his behind. "Krystal Karrington" starts the album auspiciously with a piano sample and adds in a compelling, thick bass stomp and a bass-heavy beat. As a juxtaposition, "Luchini aka This Is It" soars exuberantly on horn samples and complex vocals that fill in every available space not occupied by the intoxicating beat. "Sparkle" could have been recorded live in a smoky jazz club, with a decidedly laid back feel conveyed by relaxed piano grooves repeated underneath vibes and intricate lyrics. Ish from Diggable Planets pops up on "Swing" to dispel rumors that he is one of the two Camp Lo vocalists, and he represents his Butterfly persona with a stanza of lyrics that wander among the minimal production and alight on the beats just enough to maintain the rhythm. I was surprised that Barry White wasn't a featured guest on "Black Nostaljack." Geechi Suede and Sonny Cheeba recline in the swing beat and crescendo of strings as if balancing on a waterbed, and the lyrics would persuade Garth Brooks to lie back, pop open some champagne, and groove with a few honeys.

Camp Lo revises the party-jam ethic of artists like Chubb Rock while maintaining enough integrity that they don't fall into the "crossover" category. *Uptown Saturday Night* provides a glimpse of the possibilities not only for hip-hop but contemporary R&B as well, and shows that a little digging through some old soil can still turn up some lively material.

## TODD GILCHRIST

**Music Review**  
Camp Lo  
*Uptown Saturday Night*  
Night  
Profile Records  
A

Notorious B.I.G.  
*Life After Death*  
Bad Boy  
Entertainment  
B

### Arts & Entertainment Calendar

#### MUSIC

**THURSDAY, APRIL 10**  
JOE WILLIAMS. The Cave. 452 1/2 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 968-9308.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 11**  
BOB MOULD W/ AMY RIGBY. Cat's Cradle. 300 E. Main St., Carrboro. 967-9053.  
DANIELLE HOWLE & THE TANTRUMS W/ JOHN GILLESPIE. Lizard and Snake Cafe. 110 N. Columbia St., Chapel Hill. 929-2828.  
THE V-RAYS W/ CRAVIN' DOGS. Local 506. 506 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 942-5506.  
MELANIE SPARKS W/ SCALLIWAG. The Cave. 452 1/2 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 968-9308.  
STREET SOUNDS A CAPPELLA PERFORMANCE. 8 p.m. Carolina Theatre, Durham. 560-3040.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 12**  
KNOCKED DOWN SMILIN' W/ HIPBONE AND JOHN THURSDAY. Cat's Cradle. 300 E. Main St., Carrboro. 967-9053.  
THE BAD DOG BLUES BAND. The Cave. 452 1/2 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 968-9308.

**SUNDAY, APRIL 13**  
LIGHTNIN' WELLS. The Cave. 452 1/2 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 968-9308.  
THE LILY BANDITS. Local 506. 506 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 942-5506.  
UNSAFE W/ KISS IT GOODBYE AND SWEET DIESEL. Cat's Cradle. 300 E. Main St., Carrboro. 967-9053.  
OPEN JAZZ JAM WITH GUEST MIKE WADDELL. The ArtsCenter, 300-G E. Main St., Carrboro. 929-2787. \$3 all tickets.  
30 AMP FUSE W/ MANOS. Lizard and Snake Cafe. 110 N. Columbia St., Chapel Hill. 929-2828.

**MONDAY, APRIL 14**  
ROGER MANNING. Lizard and Snake Cafe. 110 N. Columbia St., Chapel Hill. 929-2828.  
BILL WESTON III. The Cave. 452 1/2 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 968-9308.  
ROGER MANNING W/ MIND SIRENS. Local 506. 506 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 942-5506.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 15**  
SON VOLT W/ RICHARD BUCKNER. Cat's Cradle. 300 E. Main St., Carrboro. 967-9053.  
US BOMBS W/ 30 FOOT FALL. Lizard and Snake Cafe. 110 N. Columbia St., Chapel Hill. 929-2828.  
RICHARD FONTAINE W/ THE GLADHANDS. Local 506. 506 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 942-5506.  
N.C. SONGWRITERS ALLIANCE. The Cave. 452 1/2 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 968-9308.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16**  
THE ASHLEY STOVE. Local 506. 506 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 942-5506.  
SON VOLT W/ RICHARD BUCKNER. Cat's Cradle. 300 E. Main St., Chapel Hill. 967-9053.  
FOOD NOT BOMBS BENEFIT W/ HELLENBER AND SMEARCASE. Lizard and Snake Cafe. 110 N. Columbia St., Chapel Hill. 929-2828.  
THE OUTHOUSE POETS. The Cave. 452 1/2 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill. 968-9308.

**DANCE**  
N.C. YOUTH TAP ENSEMBLE. Student tap performance featuring Josh Hilberman, Michael Minen and Savion Glover. Sunday at

3 p.m. Carolina Theatre, Durham. 560-3040.

#### FILM

"THE CRUCIBLE." Thursday at 6:30 and 9 p.m. Carolina Union Auditorium, UNC campus. \$2 admission. 962-1449.  
"DAYLIGHT." Friday at 6:30 p.m., 9 p.m., and 11:30 p.m. Carolina Union Auditorium, UNC campus. \$2 admission. 962-1449.  
"A CLOCKWORK ORANGE." Sunday at 7 p.m. Carolina Union Auditorium, UNC campus. 962-1449.

#### ART

CHAPEL HILL PRESERVATION SOCIETY 1997 ART EXHIBIT. Featuring pottery by Dorothy Davis, mixed media structures by James Jordan and paintings by Lisa Creed. Horace Williams House, Chapel Hill. 942-7818.

#### THEATRE

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' "THE GLASS MENAGERIE." Friday at 8 p.m. Raleigh Little Theatre, 301 Pogue St., Raleigh. 821-4579.  
"A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC." Saturday, April 19 at 8 p.m. PlayMakers Repertory Company, UNC campus.

#### CLEFS

FROM PAGE 5

crowd on a journey through childhood with a series of skits portraying a chaotic preschool class, a junior high dance and a high school pep rally.

During the junior high skit, a typical middle-school skirmish exploded into a street fight reminiscent of "West Side Story." Adding a dance to the scene, the Clefs jived their way through Michael Jackson's "Beat It" and astonished the crowd with their graceful moves.

The Clefs remained true to their music and blew the crowd away with songs ranging from James Taylor's "Carolina In My Mind" to Bob Marley's "No Woman, No Cry." Capturing the dry but soulful sound of George Michael, Dave Moricca led the group through the seductive "Father Figure." The song selection was accented further with an Aussie feel when soloist J.B. Baker explored the sounds of the outback and took the

lead singing "Land Down Under." As the show neared its end, the Clefs stopped for a moment to acknowledge their graduating seniors. Reading misty-eyed farewell messages written by the seniors' mothers, the Clefs said their goodbyes with class. Having caught spring fever, the Clef Hangers dazzled the sold-out crowd with crisp harmony and once again passed to their listeners a little bit of their trademark musical magic.

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