

Animé Flick Loses Magic In American Translation

By JEREMY HURTZ
Staff Writer

Japanese people don't share most Americans' belief that cartoon art — comic books (*manga*) and animated films (*animé*) — must be suitable for children. The graphically violent, psychosexual horror film "Perfect Blue" proves this dissimilarity and, unfortunately, also demonstrates the difficulties of translating serious animé for an American audience.

MOVIE REVIEW
"Perfect Blue"

The story is familiar enough: pop icon Mima decides to quit singing in order to further her acting career. As she makes the announcement after her last concert, a pale, shadowy figure in the audience reacts oddly; soon Mima starts receiving death threats. Then her friends are targeted for a series of gruesome deaths, and Mima's hold on reality begins to slip.

The plot becomes extremely convoluted in the film's second half. This gives the audience an uncanny sense of disorientation, shared with Mima. We question the picture's events along with her: Is the shadowy figure responsible? Is Mima already crazy, or just getting there? Do Japanese women really clap and giggle whenever anything remotely happy happens?

Therein lies the heart of "Perfect Blue's" problems. Since many of the conventions of Japanese animé are intact — giggling women, ugly villains, odd and obvious pacing of shots — American audiences unfamiliar with these conventions can be thrown by them.

Visually, the film is sound. These visuals are not as technically impressive

as those found in most American animated features, but they're superior from an artistic standpoint. And by animé standards, even the technical side of things is mighty good.

"Perfect Blue" is a good testimony of the unique capabilities of animation — in a live-action picture, the graphic violence and nudity common late in the film would become sensationalistic. Here it is unsettling, but not upsetting.

Ultimately, the single element that ruins "Perfect Blue" is the dialogue. It's poorly dubbed, which causes unfortunate laughter at the wrong times (as with Mima's Japanese mother, who is voiced for the English version with a thick Southern drawl).

Worse, it's poorly written — or, more likely, poorly translated. With these two problems compounding each other, audience members end up listening to characters who endlessly spout clichés — and don't even sound like they mean them.

Last year Miramax had enough clout to hire an excellent author, Neil Gaiman, to translate the animé classic "Princess Mononoke." They then gave it a voice cast full of recognizable American actors and a wide release.

But more often, major studios aren't willing to take risks on animé, so promising films don't receive the attention or distribution they deserve.

This is true of "Perfect Blue." Those involved in making it accessible in American theaters must be commended, because most animé films, including many Japanese blockbusters, become direct-to-video in America.

But those involved in making this film accessible to American sensibilities have failed.

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Flintstones Film Exudes Style and Savvy

By DANIELE EUBANKS
Arts & Entertainment Assistant Editor

Who would have thought that one of America's favorite couples, domestic icons for 40 years, got hitched in Vegas? Rock Vegas, that is.

In a kitschy romp through the prehistoric past "The Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas" tells the story of how good ol' Fred and Wilma met and bet on a full house.

MOVIE REVIEW
"The Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas"

With a predictable plot and flat, cartoonish characters, this prequel to the 1994 comedy "The Flintstones" isn't profound, but you can't expect the first generation of Homo sapiens to get everything right.

More limerick than epic, the movie succeeds as a lighthearted diversion, bringing the lovable qualities of the '60s television series to the big screen.

Wilma Slaghoople, (Kristen Johnston, "3rd Rock from the Sun") is the unhappy daughter of millionaires Colonel and Pearl Slaghoople. She runs away to Bedrock to avoid marrying sickeningly snobbish Chip Rockefeller (Thomas Gibson, "Dharma and Greg").

While waiting tables at the local BrontoKing, Betty O'Shale (Jane Krakowski, "Ally McBeal") runs into Wilma and befriends her, letting her share her Melrock Place apartment and getting her a job at the BrontoKing.

Enter Fred Flintstone, (Mark Addy, "The Full Monty") a "boy from the wrong side of the rocks," and his pal Barney Rubble (Stephen Baldwin), who fall head over bare heels for the girls.

Determined to protect his financial future, Chip invites the foursome to his casino in Rock Vegas, hoping to steal Wilma back and secure his fortune. But the show is called the Flintstones, not the Rockefelleres, so after a series of foibles, true love prevails.



Live-action versions of cartoon classics Fred, Wilma, Betty and Barney frolic throughout a prehistoric Las Vegas in "The Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas," which is directed by Brian Lavant.

Addy and Baldwin play blue-collar buddies Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble impeccably and are very believable manifestations of the cartoon images they probably watched as kids. Their simple camaraderie is touching and their dull-witted repartee humorous.

Joan Collins is devilishly good as Pearl, the mother who fears Wilma might marry beneath her. She chillingly dominates her scenes, uncannily similar to Cruella DeVile of Disney's "101 Dalmatians." Like Cruella, her over-the-top wardrobe is a sight to behold.

In fact, the costuming in general is very good and adds to the trippy flavor of the film. A wacky assortment of tunic tuxedos, variations on Wilma's classic white dress and Betty's blue one, and a cornucopia of textures, colors and flamboyant accessories adorn the cast. Krakowski and Johnston provide average performances, but fail to memorably flesh out their characters. Johnston is also a really bad dancer, and her awkwardness is glaringly obvious in the last choreographed scene.

But the witty imagination of the visual effects crew is to be commended, as "Vegas" dusts off some of the classic stone-age gadgets and tosses in a few new ones. A pterodactyl airplane, bronco-coaster, massage octopus, oversized rock-crystal martini glasses and chiseled

out french-fry boxes all give the movie a quirky, anachronistic-but-not-flair.

The computer-generated dinosaurs and prehistoric puppets from Jim Henson's creature shop are much more realistic than those in the earlier live-action Flintstones film and blend nicely with the human cast.

Director Brian Levant has successfully crafted the missing link with "The Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas." Discovering the origins of the Flintstones species is fun, so yabadaba do check it out.

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Low-Budget Film Stresses Characterization

By MATT MANSFIELD
Staff Writer

In "The Terrorist," writer and director Santosh Sivan displays how the idea of suicide bombing the enemy for "the cause" becomes harder and harder the closer one gets to the moment it is supposed to

MOVIE REVIEW
"The Terrorist"

happen. Malli (Ayesha Dharker), a 19-year-old Indian whose family has a history of committing terrorist acts for "the cause," decides to be a martyr for the latest protest against the establishment.

Sivan shows the brutality of terrorist life by making a shooting of a traitor from the insurgency Malli's first act in the movie.

The character's introduction is eye-opening, and the audience immediately knows this girl has an agenda.

The movie has very little dialogue, making the actors develop their characters through their actions and conjuring of memories. This lack of dialogue shows Malli as the strong, silent type who hides her emotions from the audience suspensefully until near the film's end.

The movie's cinematography beautifully accentuates her demanding lifestyle. After killing a man with a cloth mask on her head, Malli serenely sits by a river and drops the mask into a gentle pool. Then her leader calls her back for another assignment, and she quickly leaves as the mask drifts from the pool to a raging rapid, symbolizing the unending drama in her world.

Sivan effectively shows the psychological preparations Malli and her conspirators make before the assassination. They practice every day the motions of exactly how she will bomb herself in front of the enemy.

But the audience also sees into Malli's underlying, conflicting emotions. In the many sequences where Malli takes a

shower, she reflects on past missions. She remembers taking care of a dying comrade in the rain. The boy asks her if she is crying, and she replies that the rain is falling on her face, though the audience cannot tell either way.

When the memory fades back to her, bathing in the shower, the water falling on her face makes it hard to tell if she is crying.

The effect puzzles the audience because they do not know whether she is crying or having reservations about this mission and way of life.

Although Sivan creates a deep, psychological film, the plot moves slowly for the typical American audience. It is also noticeably low-budget, with some of the blood looking exactly like red paint from a '50s B-movie.

Still, for those who appreciate characters with ethical dilemmas and symbolic cinematography, "The Terrorist" is worth seeing.

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