

Polanski adds twist to Dickens' classic

BY WHITNEY ISENHOWER
STAFF WRITER

Oliver Twist is never in the right place at the right time, but thankfully the new film that shares his name often is.

Roman Polanski's latest period project is a visually appealing piece about an orphan who falls into a variety of unlucky circumstances.

Dealing with the themes of class, society and greed, it's a story that unfortunately never will be outdated.

Oliver Twist, played by newcomer Barney Clark, starts out in an orphanage and is tossed around by uncaring adults before he finds his way to the streets of London.

He then falls into a gang of boy pickpockets led by a man named Fagin, a creepy yet pitiable figure, played by Sir Ben Kingsley.

Based on the classic Charles Dickens work, "Oliver Twist" feels like a novel at times.

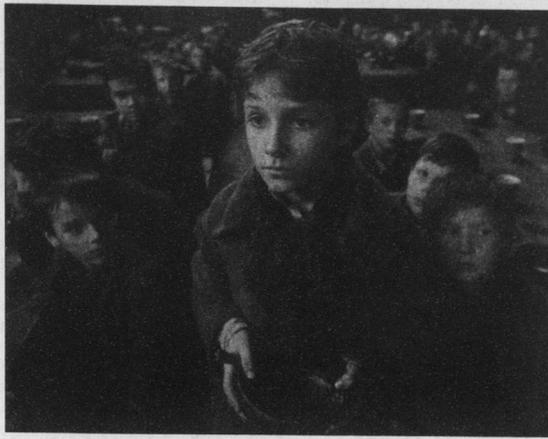
It ends and begins with sketched drawings of locales that could be found among pages of a leatherbound book.

Polanski's use of light to situate a mood is so dramatic, contrasting between different scenes, that it's akin to an author's detailed description.

His film reminds the audience how people who have very much can be greedy — as can people who have very little.

The men in Oliver's orphanage feed children quarter-full bowls of porridge, and revel in shock over their bountiful table when Oliver wants seconds. (Yes, screenwriter Ronald Harwood didn't forget the well-known "Please, sir, I want some more" line.)

Fagin and his friends live in



The adorable Barney Clark makes a big-screen splash in 'Oliver Twist,' director Roman Polanski's adaptation of Charles Dickens' classic work.

cramped quarters with enough to eat and drink. But they hoard gold and jewels for themselves, keeping the goods from Oliver and the other boys.

Oliver is merely a pawn for everyone's gain. Here, Clark deals well with the script's weighty subject matter, though his performance often is overshadowed by the film's veteran stars.

With all of his troubles popping off in an almost two-and-half hour span — and often in cockney accents that even the most avid British television fan might find hard to understand — the film luckily escapes the boredom often associated with period pieces.

Polanski eases through scene after scene, keeping the viewer interested throughout the film.

Besides, Twist is such a sympathetic character that it's hard to look away — the fate of a 10-year-

MOVIE REVIEW

'OLIVER TWIST'

★★★★

old orphan is at hand.

Though it revolves around children, this film is hardly child's play. (For that one might look more towards Disney's "Oliver and Company.")

Assertions about greed and the consequences of environment will resonate with a mature demographic.

Polanski explores the ambiguities of what it means to leave others behind and to rise above circumstances.

His approach to the tale, still relevant today, does Dickens a great justice.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Wolf Parade hits the high road on 'Queen'

BY JACKY BRAMMER
STAFF WRITER

Hype is both a gift and a curse. It entails an expectation for success and a readiness for failure.

With a pedigree like Wolf Parade, the hype is twice as troubling on both ends.

After a year of opening for the Arcade Fire, catching the ear of Modest Mouse brain trust Isaac Brock, and getting signed to Sub Pop records Wolf Parade has been dubbed the next "It" band.

But do they live up to the hype?

The Montreal quartet's full-length LP, *Apologies to Queen Mary*, fits somewhere between "angst-ridden menagerie" and "plaintive epic."

Just don't try to find those genres in any rock dictionary.

Singer/guitarist Dan Boeckner's contemplative vocals evoke images of a grief-ridden generation overcome with entrapment in the conveniences of a "Modern World":

"I'm not in love with the modern world/It was a torch driving the savages back to the trees/... It's gotta last to build up your eyes/And a lifetime of red skies."

On "I'll Believe In Anything," Spencer Krug takes the aural reins and tells how this dependence on an apathetic urban society creates

a race of pseudo-pod people.

Underneath these melancholy odes though, there lie some rockin' beats and hedonistic melodies.

The combination of the two duel to create a battle of dissonant and consonant sounds. It's crazy.

Boeckner provides sterling guitar work that trades jabs with the ever-present keyboards of Hadji Bakara and Krug.

Drummer Arlen Thompson keeps the pace intact throughout the sprawling 48 minutes.

But even at that length, the album is a bit too long.

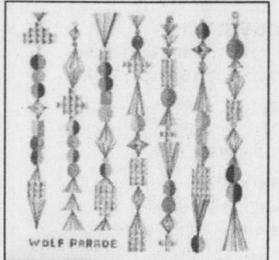
A gluttonous three-and-a-half minute instrumental at the end of "Dinner Bells" is a significant blunder.

Equally misguided are a few lyrics that don't make sense on repeated listens — much less on the first one.

But compared with a band like Sigur Rós — which has crafted several great albums around a fictional language — this becomes excusable.

Either way, Krug's lyrics maintain a consistent narrative thread throughout the album, which is a boon for listeners.

By the point of "It's A Curse," Boeckner's rugged vocals and Krug's wailed stylings bring the



MUSIC REVIEW

WOLF PARADE APOLOGIES TO THE QUEEN MARY

★★★★

album full circle as they voice frustration about how the culture of luxury has turned the natural world into a barren wasteland.

"We walked five whole minutes to the dark edge of town/Took a long look at nothing, and we turned back around."

On the closing "This Heart's on Fire," the band shows that its heart bleeds for no one.

It is instead ignited with a passion and hope that everything is already getting better.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

No frills needed on Portastatic LP

Lo-fi album boasts many bright ideas

BY ORR SHTUHL
STAFF WRITER

Pack the sunscreen, button your plaid shirts and fire up your tape decks: Portastatic has crafted the first-ever lo-fi road trip album.

The band's seventh long-player, *Bright Ideas*, boasts enough jangly chords and soaring vocals for a cross-country drive — and still sounds good coming out of a Chevrolet Nova's busted speakers.

Save for the slithering title track, which spotlights an impressive Elliott Smith whisper, singer Mac McCaughan's earnest vocals impressively tie the record together, alternately propelling and calming his songs while overcoming some of the band's ho-hum guitar riffs.

Portastatic effortlessly tries on varying musical styles, from the sunny power-pop of "Through With People" to the haunting Americana of "Truckstop Cassettes."

One of the album's strongest tracks, "I Wanna Know Girls" is the unborn anthem of a hypothetical collaboration between The Shins and Bryan Adams. Colored with strings and chock-full of background "oohs," it showcases one of McCaughan's most whimsical couplets: "Love is like an Uzi/It weighs a ton/Oh yeah, my love weighs a ton."

Immediately following is the record's sweet, plains-rolling centerpiece, "Little Fern." Evoking

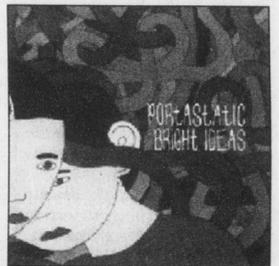
images of flora and fauna, it begs the view of a dusty horizon vibrating in a rearview mirror.

With this record Mac McCaughan takes a step away from Superchunk and truly embraces the future of Portastatic.

But *Bright Ideas* does falter at times. "White Wave" opens with a blandly banging guitar that went out of style with Third Eye Blind and goes on to rhyme "pool" with "cool" in a cringe-inducing jukebox reference.

Still, McCaughan's missteps are few and far between, and in the record's latter half he gains confidence in his lyrics, letting loose a slew of similes in the closing tracks. While they generally work, there is no need for McCaughan to prove himself as a songwriter; the indie-rock veteran is far more affecting as a straight-ahead popsmith than as a literate crooner.

In the end, *Bright Ideas* comes



MUSIC REVIEW

PORTASTATIC BRIGHT IDEAS

★★★★

out a bit sprawling, but the disc's share of highlights makes it a worthy addition to the indie-pop songbook.

So hit the road with Portastatic. It's about time you cleaned out that back seat anyway.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Sheryl Crow fit for the birds

BY MORGAN ELLIS
STAFF WRITER

When Sheryl Crow made her major-label debut in 1993, all she wanted to do was have some fun.

Twelve years and a few albums later, she's still putting out the same old sound. And it's just not fun anymore.

Her recent release, *Wildflower*, with its overproduced sound, feels dull — like the songs were rehearsed too many times before actually being put to tape.

Every track but one contains an orchestral arrangement, making the album monotonous and burying some promising songs.

The lyrics deal the heaviest blow, though.

Pop music never requires lyrics to be extremely insightful, and the track "Perfect Lie" holds true to the genre with its singsong clips.

Crow proclaims, "I don't hold no mystery" on the track — and on the single "Good is Good,"

Crow certainly proves herself: "Good is Good/And bad is bad/You don't know which one you had."

However, the childish elementary school rhymes make her songs predictable.

But if listeners can make it through inane lyrics and overused string arrangements, *Wildflower* has its moments.

The opener, "I Know Why," might be the strongest track, incorporating a gritty guitar solo and a surprisingly fitting banjo. This is the Sheryl Crow who rocked the Austin City Limits Festival in 2004.

Her title track slows the album down with minimal instrumentation and emphasizes Crow's vocal ability and melodies.

"Lifetimes" offers another change of pace, falling into a nice groove with the use of an electric piano and bass.

The final track, "Where Has All the Love Gone," brings another

MUSIC REVIEW

SHERYL CROW WILDFLOWER

★★★★

facet to the album with a sound straight out of The Beatles' catalogue — minus the lyrics, of course.

Inevitably, the use of obvious rhyme schemes holds this album back.

The fact that every song seems to be about the negative parts of love doesn't help either. Loneliness, insincerity and lost love encompass the LP's themes.

Maybe Crow should show more respect for her athlete-fiancé Lance Armstrong.

This album doesn't include Crow's best — good thing *The Very Best of Sheryl Crow* has come out already.

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