

MOVIESHORTS

ROCKNROLLA



As the third of Guy Ritchie's London crime films, "RocknRolla" ran the risk of being a remake of "Snatch," which, however engaging, is essentially a remake of "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels."

And while it is in some respects, it also proves that Ritchie has matured as a director and storyteller. The movie is just as fast and fun as its two predecessors, which alone makes it a success, but it's also more thoughtful.

The story and the script, Ritchie's two fortes, fall somewhere between an AC/DC album turned into a movie and a workingman's Shakespeare.

Because Ritchie's complex plots resist summarization, suffice it to say that "RocknRolla" covers the basics: London mobsters and insiders, criminal clans and nearly invincible Russian killing-machines. Throw in some racketeering and the frenzied pursuit of a stolen object of great value, and you can see Ritchie's trademarks everywhere.

What puts the film over the top, though, is the way Ritchie branches out into new material. Not only does he cast his first major female character in this type of film, but he also explores the effects of child abuse and drug addiction on the mind of a young rock 'n' roller.

It's strange to think of Ritchie's testosterone-driven movies having an emotional edge, but this one clearly does, and it meshes perfectly.

Some will say that "RocknRolla" is just another mindless London shoot-'em-up that uses cinematic trickery to hoodwink audiences, but when it comes to Guy Ritchie this might not be true, and even if it is, it's not immediately apparent that this is a bad thing.

-Jonathan Pattishall

STARSYSTEM

★ POOR

★★ FAIR

★★★ GOOD

★★★★ EXCELLENT

★★★★★ CLASSIC

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MADAGASCAR: ESCAPE 2 AFRICA



"Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa" does what sequels to animated kids' comedies rarely do — it makes both adults and kids laugh hard!

The original animated "Madagascar" used hilarious animal characters and fast-paced animation to net more than half a billion dollars worldwide in 2005.

And while the sequel could probably have yielded the same or better profits simply based on the original's success (not to mention merchandising), the filmmakers exceeded expectations and created a genuinely funny animated movie.

"Escape 2 Africa" features a myriad of famous voices: Chris Rock, Ben Stiller, Will i Am, and even the late Bernie Mac. The best performance, like the original, comes from Sacha Cohen, better known for his turns as "Borat" and Ali G. Cohen voices the absolutely hilarious, and only mildly stereotyping, lemur king.

In fact, there's a lot of subtle racial, sexual and political humor.

Unlike many of its contemporaries, "Escape 2 Africa" is so witty, amusing and character-driven that it doesn't feel like a cheap trick to check if parents are awake.

Instead, there are plenty of laughs for all ages, so the clever humor for the 18-and-over crowd is just gravy.

So go ahead and grudgingly volunteer to take the neighborhood kids to see "Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa." You might just have fun, too.

-David Bergart

SOUL MEN



Having seen this movie knowing that Bernie Mac is dead, I almost want to rate it higher, just because this is the first, last and only time that Bernie Mac and Samuel L. Jackson will ever work together.

Which is a shame, because they're a great team.

They play two has-been musicians, Floyd Henderson and Louis Hines (Mac and Jackson respectively) who, along with Marcus Hooks (John Legend) made up The Real Deal, a one-hit-wonder Soul trio.

The band splits up, Hooks goes on to become legendary, and Hines and Henderson fade away. Thirty years later, Hooks is dead from a heart attack, and the two remaining Real Dealers are tapped to perform at his funeral at the Apollo Theater in New York.

There's only one problem: they hate each other.

Thus begins a long trip through various towns populated with ridiculous stereotypes. At the end of the trip, both men learn lessons, grow closer, and put on a great show for

their departed comrade.

Whatever. The real reason to watch this movie is to revel at how good Mac and Jackson are at arguing with each other.

Forgetting the frequent lapses into slapstick, the staleness of the plot or the lack of serious focus on the men's relationship with Louis Hines' long-lost daughter Cleo (Sharon Leal), this movie shines simply because Jackson and Mac are, without a doubt, two of the best cussers in Hollywood.

Both have the ability to take any random series of insults and four-letter words and quickly shape them into a beautiful sculpture of apoplectic hatred, a rare skill that is fast fading from the film industry. It really is funny to just watch people like this argue.

"Soul Men" isn't great, but it's entertaining, and in a time of year when Hollywood churns out terrible movies, it's nice to find one with some soul.

-Evan Hughes

ROLE MODELS



Though it might come as some surprise after watching the movie, Judd Apatow did not produce, write or direct "Role Models," despite the fact that the movie copies the "raunchy-yet-somehow-sweet" comedic formula that Apatow has made his patent.

And without him, the movie is a moderate achievement instead of the big one it could've been.

Seann William Scott and Paul Rudd star as Wheeler and Danny, two salesmen who are forced to become the "Sturdy Wings," a bastardization of the Big Brother program, for two dysfunctional children (Bobb'e J. Thompson and McLovin himself Christopher Mintz-Plasse) as part of a plea bargain following an unfortunate legal incident.

Most of the laughs come from the interaction between Wheeler and Thompson's character Ronnie, an amusing junior-voyeur. The middle of the movie is bogged down, focusing far too much on Mintz-Plasse's participation in a "Dungeons & Dragons"-style, live-action, role-playing game. The only chuckles in this section come from several accidentally homoerotic statements made by the game's players, which only Danny seems to pick up on ("Let us touch our tips gingerly!")

one player exhorts as he crosses swords with his comrades).

"Role Models" is the kind of film that leaves the audience shrugging indifferently as they leave the theatre. If it had only ditched some of the extraneous nonsense for more actual comedy, it could have been a hilarious success.

-Mark Niegelsky

MUSICSHORTS

THE 88



NOT ONLY ... BUT ALSO



POP/ROCK

The 88's new album, *Not Only ... But Also*, radiates "cool."

The band's sound is similar to other pop-rock bands that hail from Los Angeles; the trio's high-energy pop/rock sound is reminiscent of bands like Rooney and, at times, Dublin's The Thrills.

There's also a lackadaisical feel to the album. Every song sounds like it would be perfectly at home in the background of a rerun of *The O.C.* (this theory was proved true after further research — one of the band's songs actually was featured on the show).

The band shows a slight amount of versatility between songs, which vary between fast paced love songs and, well, more laid back love songs.

There's an occasional lamentation of loss, a tried-and-true subject within pop music, but love seems to be the main theme for album.

However, the opening song, "Go Go Go," is the only one that seems to break free of the pro-love mold. Frenetically fast, it concerns an unfulfilling relationship in which the singer Keith Slettedahl proclaims, "I will call you when I wanna/I will call you when I can/I don't care if you get lonely."

The fact that the next song is entitled "Love You Anytime" — and that many similar songs follow — cancels out that initial attempt at showing off a tougher edge.

Despite a lack of variety in subject material, the album is still entertaining; the melodies are catchy and might produce spontaneous urges within the listener to dance dorkily about their room.

-Cassie Perez

ROGUE MOTEL DAYLIGHT BREAKING



POP/ROCK

Rogue Motel creates the soundtrack for the characters of a nighttime soap. Their lives are falling to pieces around them as the brooding characters try to regain any semblance to

the life they hoped to have.

Possibly sitting at the bar, driving alone or sitting by the water, the music fills the space of their solitude as it does for listeners, captures their hearts and propels them forward into their next staged reaction of rushing to their loved one, forgiving someone or simply leaving that empty place to return home.

The band, originally from the Northwest, met in Lexington, Ky., to put together *Daylight Breaking*. "We cut 'Fault' that night," singer Matthew Kendall remembers in a quote on the band's Web site, "and I think you can hear it in the energy of that track, everyone was working really hard to find the right place, getting to know each other musically through recording was really special."

"Fault" is not the only track on the album in which Kendall's voice captures the attention of listeners. Paired with understated guitar, drums and other instruments, Kendall's voice captures the hopes, dreams, shortcomings and misunderstood feelings of everyday people, as he sings with the heartfelt voice of a man who clearly has walked a similar journey.

The raw emotion galvanizes listeners together on the first track "Hurry Up," as he sings, "I've been looking for a way to ease my pain."

Despite the standard pop-rock sound, the album doesn't lose the focus of the first track, and the energy Kendall speaks of permeates everywhere, expressing a longing for closure and happiness that most any listener should relate to.

-Rachel Arnett

ERIC WILSON AND EMPTY HEARTS QUARTERFUSE



COUNTRY

If nothing else, Eric Wilson has heart. And a lot of it.

"Two boot pairs and three states ago I left my home," he sings to open *Quarterfuse*, the impressive debut from Wilson and his band, Empty Hearts.

Recalling the early days of Whiskeytown, the group mixes flourishes of steel guitar with the occasional — but always effective — guitar solo to achieve heart wrenching results.

But, unlike many alt-country

contemporaries, the band seems to tie itself to the roots of country.

With lyrics like, "Growin' wasn't easy for this coal miner's boy/But life is harder now that I'm old," the band draws a line straight back to the roots of the genre, a move that could come off as forced, but the earnestness of Wilson's voice makes sure that doesn't happen.

Like all good country music, *Quarterfuse* is painfully honest, incredibly relatable and heartfelt.

-Jamie Williams

TOM GABEL HEART BURNS



MODERN ROCK

In a world where Bad Company's Paul Rogers is the new front man for Queen and Led Zeppelin has been rumored to be replacing Robert Plant with the former singer of Alter Bridge (yes, the band that formed in the ashes of Creed), it's easy to interpret the new solo EP from Against Me!'s Tom Gabel as a tryout to be the next transplanted head of a formerly formidable outfit.

Throughout the record, the punk stalwart tries on different styles of popular music, most of which don't fit him at all.

On three piano-tinged folk tracks with arrangements which float along so blandly that they garner the same reaction as the buzz from an air conditioner, Gabel sounds less like a punk legend and more like Billy Idol.

And while it's hard to hear such whitewashed muck from a former hero, there are a few suits here that actually fit.

"Random Hearts" chugs along with lock-step guitars and drum machines that suggest what Beck might sound like if he was informed more by punk than folk.

And "Anna Is A Stool Pigeon" steals the rhythmic interchanges and harmonica of the E Street Band to relate a stark saga of foiled revolutionaries.

But like all the bands Gabel seeks to put his own spin on, the E Street Band already has a front man, and together they make music that's head and shoulders better than anything here.

-Jordan Lawrence

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