

ALBUM REVIEWS

'Para Toda Vida'

Nobody likes a whiner. Matthew Pryor, one of the Get Up Kids, whines a lot while singing for his New Amsterdams. Consequently, the latest album, *Para Toda Vida*, by said Amsterdams isn't that fun of a listen. Pryor really doesn't whine all that much when he's singing for the Get Up Kids, and their stuff isn't all that bad. But *Para Toda Vida* is a chore to get through, and it's only half an hour long. It's not that the album is bad — in smaller doses it's worth hearing — but the mood never changes, dragging the listener down like an anchor.



Courtesy of Vagrant Records

The harmonica on the opener, "My Old Man Had a Pistol," actually gets *Para Toda Vida* off to a fun start, but after that it's all downhill, at least when it comes to emotions. The songs are mostly non-distinct. Not because they're bad, but because without much variation from the acoustic guitar, and a barely-any-percussion sound, it's hard to tell where one song ends and the next begins. Worth hearing? Yeah, in parts. But if you're feeling as down as the New Amsterdams, you'll probably feel a lot better if you spend your \$15 on something else.

— Reviewed by Justin Stranzl

'The Royal Tenenbaums'

Movie soundtracks today frequently include songs that are never used in movies. The soundtrack to *The Royal Tenenbaums* is great precisely because its songs are essential to the quality of the film.

Wes Anderson directed *Rushmore* before he directed *The Royal Tenenbaums*, and he used '60s garage rock by bands like the Who, the Kinks and the Creation to highlight *Rushmore's* zany, "seize the day" pace.



Courtesy of Hollywood Records

Tenenbaums alternates among several moods, bouncing from lovelorn to comical to darkly serious, and Anderson matches each scene with songs by artists that fit: the Ramones, Nico and Nick Drake, respectively. Like *Rushmore*, *Tenenbaums* is scored by Mark Mothersbaugh (Devo, the music to *Rugrats*), and his jazz ensemble provides an aural backdrop that is as raucous and varied as the works from the soundtrack's best bands. Anyone who sees *The Royal Tenenbaums* is going to have scenes like Margot and Richie's reunion and Richie's actions in front of the mirror stuck in his or her head after the movie's end. That's partly because those scenes, like much of the movie, are amazingly good, but it's also because of their matching music, (Nico and Elliott Smith, respectively).

The Royal Tenenbaums is a movie worth seeing again and again. Because its songs are so key to the feel of the movie, its soundtrack will allow anyone to relive its best scenes long after *Tenenbaums* leaves theaters.

— Reviewed by Justin Stranzl

MOVIE REVIEW



Associated Press

'A Walk to Remember'

Before *A Walk to Remember* began, there was a small catfight in the back row of the theater between some high school girls over who got to sit next to the cutest boy in the group. As I reminded myself to give-up reviewing PG-rated movies, I thought this little tiff might be the most memorable part of my movie-going experience. I was wrong — the film itself was quite memorable as well.

A Walk to Remember, based on the Nicholas Sparks' book of the same title, tells the story of Jamie Sullivan (played by pop-star Mandy Moore). Jamie is the daughter of a minister in a small, rural town in North Carolina. She is the perfect daughter, perfect student; content with her life. Jamie's world is flipped upside down when she starts spending time with Landon Carter (Shane West), the town's bad boy. Landon and Jamie suddenly find themselves in the same social circles when Landon is forced to participate in extracurricular activities as punishment for his latest stunt.

The film, tagged a romantic drama, spends the majority of its time with cheesy-romance coupled with Christian overtones and high school politics. Then Jamie gets sick, and the story gets dramatic. The focus shifts from Jamie to Landon and the transformation that takes place when the bad boy turns good — a reflection of their love. I'm a total sucker for chick flicks. *A Walk to Remember* is indeed a chick flick in all its PG glory. The story is innocent, endearing and Moore is charming as its leading lady.

— Reviewed by Jenn Heindol



Associated Press

James Caviezel, center left, gives a strong performance as Edmund Dantes, the hero in 'The Count of Monte Cristo.' The cast, in fact, is the film's strongest link.

Old ac'Count' retold

Good acting refreshes, enlivens 'Count of Monte Cristo'

By Nicholas Norcia
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER | ndn109@psu.edu

Some films are not meant to be meaningful or significant; they are meant to be distractions, entertainment, or, in short, movies. *The Count of Monte Cristo* works best as a movie, but falters when it tries to be a film.

Alexandre Dumas, the author of the classic novel of the same name, is one of those writers whose works have lent themselves to countless adaptations (he also wrote the *Three Musketeers* tales). There have been 105 screen versions of Dumas' various works dating back to a silent adaptation of *The Count of Monte Cristo* in 1913.

But, director Kevin Reynolds and screenwriter Jay Wolpert do a decent job of telling the story in a way that makes it fresh and vibrant. The film, set in the early 19th century, begins on the island of Elba, where Napoleon has been exiled. Two shipmates, Edmund and Fernand, who are best buds, brave the island in hopes that they can get their ailing captain much-needed medical attention. They manage to get a doctor for the captain, but at a price.

Napoleon asks that Edmund return the favor by delivering a letter to an old friend of his. Edmund naively agrees and the mistake haunts him for the

rest of his life, as Fernand betrays him and has him thrown in prison — and steals his girl. Edmund, understandably peeved about his situation, starts plotting revenge on Fernand and the others who conspired to have him incarcerated.

Luckily, Edmund makes a friend. Richard Harris, fresh off his much-lauded portrayal of Headmaster Dumbledore in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, plays a soldier-turned priest, wrongfully imprisoned. Though Edmund and he spend most of their waking hours digging to a distant freedom, the priest spends the rest of the time schooling his uneducated neighbor on literacy, mathematics, business, and swordplay. They edge toward escape and, after gaining his freedom, Edmund assumes the identity of a mysterious nobleman, the Count of Monte Cristo.

The cast is probably the best reason to see the film. The vastly underrated James Caviezel (*The Thin Red Line*, *Frequency*) stars as Edmund Dantes, in a stellar performance that tracks his transformation from an innocent, gawky fool in love to the cold, scheming title role. Guy Pearce (*Memento*, *L.A. Confidential*), who is gradually becoming one of my favorite actors, is splendidly sinister as Fernand. Dagmara Dominczyk, a relative newcomer holds her own as Edmund's lover/Fernand's wife, Mercedes. Richard Harris is

a godsend in the role of the wise, weary, warrior priest, wheezing his way through a prison break at age 70. And Luis Guzman — of *Traffic* and *Boogie Nights* fame — shows up and almost steals the show.

The film's weaker moments come from its attempt to justify itself as something more than a simple revenge/adventure yarn. This comes in the form of a religious "conversion" which Edmund apparently has either in prison or shortly afterwards; the film is rather unclear about when Edmund's faith is truly restored, though by the end we are led to believe that his thirst for revenge was religiously motivated. It is a betrayal to Caviezel's dark, multi-dimensional performance to excuse Edmund's heartless deeds as noble and even religious.

But, the cast consistently comes through and saves us. Pearce is connivingly cool as the villain. In a movie with a less interesting protagonist, I'd have been rooting for Fernand to rise to the top and stay at the top, forever reveling in his dastardliness. But, Caviezel is truly in a zone as Edmund and, particularly, as the Count, and keeps us on his side.

As far as revenge tales go, this ranks almost as well as *Gladiator*, but nowhere near *Memento* or *Braveheart*.

'Real World' more predictable than ever

Reviewed by Kim Tranell
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER | kat179@psu.edu

Let's face it. MTV's *The Real World* has never really been completely "real."

The half-hour dose of life set to a buzz-worthy soundtrack always had cast members who played to the camera. And then there's the inevitable truth that the show is, in fact, edited.

But now, after almost 10 years of pumping up the level of spectacle, it may be time for a little less interference from the production staff. So far, *The Real World Chicago, Season 11* (MTV, Tuesdays, 10 p.m.) seems a little too tailored to one specific theme.

MTV and Bunim/Murray Productions, the masterminds behind what has become a pop culture phenomenon, wasted no time in bombarding us with an all-new season of carefully patched together drama. Here they were: seven new strangers, picked to live in a house and have their lives taped ... well, you all know how it goes by now.

Viewers were able to get acquainted with this season's victims during a painfully uneventful hour-long introduction on Jan. 15. On the male side, there's Theo, the player, Kyle, your All-American Ivy League hunk, and Chris, a gentle-man-

nered gay recovering alcoholic who struggles with how and when to come out of the closet to his housemates.

On the other hand is Aneesa, an outspoken, open lesbian who doesn't mind roaming the new house minus her clothing (sorry Aneesa, but Ruthie from Hawaii has already blazed those trails). And then there's Cara, who just might hook up with half of Chicago before the group's six-month stay is over (more on this later).

There's also Tonya, a conservative foster child who, from the looks of it, will spend much of her time in Chicago on the phone with her boyfriend, and Keri, a New Orleans native already showing signs of a potential romance with Kyle.

And if there's any question on how I love (or lust) could blossom so quickly, a look around the trendy, three-story abode will provide an answer. From the hot tub, to the shower built for two, to the various sex books littered throughout — the powers that be made sure the house was stocked with quite a few quasi-aphrodisiacs.

And this, of course, just highlights what has become a pattern throughout the past several seasons. The producers have been attempting to play up certain themes with each cast, which is fine if they aren't magnified and exaggerated to the point of sickness.

But last season in New York, racial issues took over the plot (if *The Real World* can be said to have one), and it seems that this season promiscuity and sexual preference will be at the forefront. The first two episodes, and the house itself, indicate that the execs behind the show were hoping their "seven strangers" would partake in one giant, Chicago-style romp with an occasional taste of controversy over some cast mates' alternative lifestyles.

Take, for example, episode one. Aneesa can't seem to understand why Theo, who she knows is attracted to her, gets the wrong idea when she hops in the shower with him. And Kyle? Well, he admittedly can't stop looking at Keri's chest.

Episode two packs twice as much sexual punch in its half-hour. Cara hooks up with three different guys, one of which is the singer in a band (which would have been cool if the unidentified rocker didn't have a big blotch covering his head throughout the post-concert rendezvous).

All this doesn't mean the new season can't be entertaining. The cast has gotten more messed up, and, therefore, more interesting. But, at least in the past, there was some suspense and a little room for anticipation. Now the show just travels down a predetermined, production-driven, predictable path.

The Roots make Jay-Z come to life on 'Unplugged' album

Reviewed by Mike Caggese
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER | mkc140@psu.edu

Live music takes on an awkward shape when implanted on disc. Mistakes made are on the record, literally. Practice, patience and precision are essential. On *Jay-Z Unplugged*, all are prevalent but a holla must go to the people whose instruments are actually unplugged, The Roots.

Well, Jay-Z's mic was wireless, but something must have been plugged in. If MTV's patented Unplugged stamp wasn't branded on the album's cover, unplugged is the last word I'd use to describe the album. Despite cheating the rules, Jay-Z Unplugged is as dynamic and audience-fueled as that of LL Cool J.

Not only did The Roots recreate Jay-Z's cuts, they sliced a few extra layers into them. Since rap is mainly percussion-based, The Roots utilize three percussion stations behind Jay-Z lead by Scratch. All three follow the lead of ?uestlove, who strikes the skins and cymbals. Each song stripped of Jay-Z seductive chauvin-

ism bears a strong resemblance to the funkier Dave Matthews tracks. Breaking through the bass, Jay-Z's flow flaunts his riches making it difficult not to bob your head as he lips, "H to tha izz-O, V to tha izz-A / Fo' shizzle my nizzle used to dribble down in VA." Between battles with Nas on "Takeover," The Roots throw in a not-long-enough rendering of the Doors' "Five to One."

And if your shoulders and hips aren't rolling during "I Just Wanna Love U (Give it 2 Me)," throw Kenny G back into your system and continue imitating a board. For me, I'll just low ride, top down, left arm raised over the wheel.

Digging the tracks is easy. I couldn't help but bust out a move or two (luckily no one was looking) inspired by the Jigga's non-stop tidal wave of playa wisdom on "Girls, Girls, Girls." The song takes on a few moods with the assistance of a pair of singing violins.

Worth noting is the flute in "Big Pimpin'" — it sounds like someone is whistling. And let's be obliged that the very Mary J. Blige stopped by for

a few cuts. Most of the show concentrated on tracks taken from *The Blueprint*, Jay-Z's latest studio album.

Two of his biggest songs, "Can I Get A ..." and "Hard Knock Life," are cut short to less than two minutes each. Near the end of a few verses, Jay's breath runs faint. But where he trails off, the crowd raps on.

More importantly and slightly controversial, my question is how much of the performance is actually unplugged?

Jay and The Roots put on an outstanding performance. But had the bass guitar been unplugged, many of its hooks would be unplayable, sacrificing the quality of the show.

On studio albums, over-produced tracks can sometimes stick together. On this album, the collage of instruments backing up the Jigga distinguish track for track, note by note.

Any fan of previous Unplugged performances should get this album. Anyone in search of an excuse to diversify their CD collection should get this album.

Anyone looking to find inspiration on how to construct menace atop melody (Nas in particular) should get this album.



Courtesy of Roc-A-Fella Records