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'Trick or Treat' plot predictable; headbanger harassed by preppies

By Rod Root
Staff Reviewer

Movie Review

"Trick or Treat," starrring Gene Simmons and Ozzy Osbourne.

"Trick or Treat" contains all the elements to make an interesting movie — rock stars, suspense, special effects, the supernatural, backward music, nudity, high school violence. But for some reason this film does not really produce the excitement it promises. Ultimately it manages to underline the ideas it set out to erase. Viewers will leave with a feeling that playing records backwards will conjure up spirits of the dead, ready to wreck havoc on us all.

The plot is predictable. The class metalhead, who is harassed by the preppies constantly, worships a particular rock star. When this star dies, he is devastated. While playing one of his albums backwards, the kid hears the dead singer speaking to him. By playing it over and over, he unknowingly unleashes the evil spirit on his class. The rest of the film is spent trying to stop the spirit before he destroys everything. This movie manages to "borrow" a few scenes from other suspense flicks ("Christine," "The Entity") that the audience will notice.

What the film manages to do is to turn heavy-metal music into exactly what "special interest groups" like the PMRC and all the pseudo-religious organizations say it is. This may have been the intention of the filmmakers, but if so, they could not have gotten rockers Gene Simmons (Kiss) and Ozzy Osbourne to act in all parts. Caricatures are made of this form of music and its fans, who often don't need help when it comes to being made to look foolish. The poor use of playing music backwards will lead these interest groups to play everything backwards in hopes of finding a "boogie man."

The fact that this film's target audience is teenagers, particularly teenage metal fans, bothers me. It does nothing to try to show them this music as it should be shown. Instead it gives them what they want to see, only reinforcing the idea that hard rock serves as method of alienation from the rest of mainstream society. Unfortunately, too many of them will take the ideas in the movie all too seriously and look only to music to cure social problems.

The center of this empathy is Eddie (Marc Price), the victimized headbanger. Price manages to dress and act like a real metal fan most of the time, but fails to convince as he should. Also unconvincing is the fact that the character succeeds in getting the preppy girl in the end. This simply does not happen (at least not at my high school). But the audience will cheer him on in the scenes where he gets his revenge on the arrogant class jock.

A refugee from the "Solid Gold" dancers, Tony Fields, fails to fully develop the role of Sammy Curr, the rocker returned from the dead. He certainly looks the part, with haystacked hair and leather and chains, but that is about all. His acting is disappointing, due largely to the limitations of his character. Still there is no excuse for what he does — or fails to do — in the high school dance scene. He is terrible when he tries to look as if he was playing guitar and worse at lip syncing. Inevitably, Fields' role quite literally goes down the toilet.

Ozzy's cameo appearance as an evangelist out to stop rock'n'roll is at first very delightful. The irony of his portrayal of the very same people out to stop his music will be enjoyed by Ozzy fans. Yet even this scene has one minor flaw, although few will notice it. If you look closely, you will be able to see Ozzy's name tattooed on his knuckles. I wonder about his participation in a project with such a muddled message. Is His Ozzness selling out?

The problems with this film may have begun with the directing. Do you remember the nerd in "American Grafitti?" That character was played by Charles Martin Smith, who just happens to be handling the directing chores for this film. How can heavy metal be treated properly when a nerd is in charge?

Still, this movie is worth a look. Just remember to accept its face value, and you should enjoy it. There are some positive aspects that I have failed to mention. The original music by Australian rockers Fastway is enough reason to go. The sparse use of comedy is effective and laughable.

"Trick or Treat," rated "R" is playing at the Plaza Four Theatre.

State of the Arts

Compiled by
Stew Magnuson
Staff Reporter

At the Zoo:

John Walker is a Wesleyan philosophy professor who moonlights as a country blues artist. He has performed locally and released sefveral records. Magic Slim, the giant of the Chicago blues, is wrapping up another big week at the Zoo. These two artists will get togethr tonight for a big jam session. This is your absolute last chance to see Slim, so don't miss it. Cover is only $2.

On TV:

"Late Night with David Letterman" has two fantastic guests tonight at 11:30 p.m.: comedian Sandra Bernhard and mondo-bizzaro Talking Heads frontman David Byrne. Byrne is definitely the weirdest interviewee in the free world. It should be good and strange.

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