



Courtesy of Columbia Pictures

Peter O'Toole and a cast of thousands in Bernardo Bertolucci's "The Last Emperor."

'Last Emperor' a regal film

By John P. Coffey
Staff Reviewer

Imagine yourself the ruler of more than half the people in the world. Your home has 9,999 rooms, hundreds of women for your own pleasure, countless servants at your disposal. Your titles include "Lord of 10,000 Years" and "Son of Heaven."

Movie Review

Too good to be true? Perhaps. In the case of Pu Yi, it was. He grew up probably the loneliest boy in the world.

Pu was "The Last Emperor" of China. His life story, now a movie, is a saga seemingly so unreal that no storybook would touch it. But it really happened, and in the 20th century.

In 1908, Pu Yi was 3 years old and already the emperor of China's Ching Dynasty. Four years later, China became a republic, and 3,000 years of imperial rule came to an end.

But the boy emperor did not know this. Shielded from reality by his advisers, Pu was not allowed to roam beyond the castle walls of the Forbidden City. Even though the city was a life of luxury (the mansion had 9,999 rooms; the Chinese believed only Heaven had 10,000), it was also a life of loneliness.

While the rest of China progressed to a republic, the emperor's world remained trapped in the past. He was the only boy in China without the freedom to walk out his front door. Like many with great power

and demands, Pu's advisers controlled his personal affairs.

Even though he had, within the palace, all the power one could want, he had no freedom, no friends — he knew no one his age. They say it's lonely at the top.

In 1924, Pu Yi married two wives and reality came knocking at the palace door. Reality was a warlord who took over the Forbidden City. The emperor finally realized he had no power. He was given one hour to leave the only four walls he'd ever known. His tutor and perhaps only friend, Reginald Johnston, arranged for Pu and his wives to leave in safety.

After a few years of life in the fast lane, Pu received the opportunity to regain some of the power he'd been denied as a child. Or so he thought. The Japanese controlled the land of his ancestors, Manchuria (renamed Manchukuo). They offered him the job of emperor. But like his childhood reign, he wasn't really in charge; he was nothing more than a puppet emperor. Once again the truth was concealed from him.

World War II saw the defeat of the Japanese. Manchukuo fell to the Soviets. Four years later, communist troops under Mao Tse-Tung took control of China, and Pu Yi, the former emperor, became a prisoner in Mao's re-education prison. The movie ends with Pu's pardon and his last few years, spent as a simple gardener.

Bernardo Bertolucci's "The Last Emperor" tells one man's search for freedom. Pu's life is an inverted pyramid from the norm. Instead of starting out with all the

freedom in the world and then struggling for power, Pu begins life with all the power in the world: He just wants to be free.

He finds that it is not the riches and power of this world that set a person free. Freedom is found being a gardener and nursing the earth.

Power is a secondary theme, prevalent in Pu's struggles to regain it during his puppet reign as Manchukuo's emperor. The power struggles during the scenes documenting Mao's re-education are fascinating.

This epic film's enormous undertaking is most impressive. The negotiations with the Chinese government paving the way to shoot this true story took two years alone. According to press release information from Columbia Pictures, the Chinese government gave the production crew total freedom in shooting on location. In return, the government asked for Chinese distribution rights.

Reportedly the only intervention by the Chinese government in this not-so-flattering account of China's Mao-era atrocities was script approval and correction of factual inaccuracies.

Four actors play Pu Yi at various stages of his life. John Lone, an actor from Hong Kong now living in the United States, stars as the adult Pu. Also in the film, Joan Chen, as one of his wives, and Peter O'Toole, as his tutor, do a wonderful job.

"The Last Emperor," nominated for nine Academy Awards, is now showing at the Douglas 3 Theaters at 5:20 and 8:30 p.m.

Blonde Waltz is to the beat of a heart

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Blonde Waltz, "The Perfect Dark" (Chrome Angel Records)

Blonde Waltz creates all the feelings associated with love — ranging from the joy and excitement of a soaring heart to the pain and despair love also can bring — on their first album, "The Perfect Dark."

Blonde Waltz takes its name from "Subterranean Homesick Blues & the Blonde Waltz," a chapter from "Tarantula" by Bob Dylan. The Lincoln trio consists of Terrill Clements, bass; Bobby Heiser, drums; and Richard Sullivan, guitar and vocals. The band grew out of a '60s garage-pop band, The Gears.

Blonde Waltz's music is a synthesis of the pop sounds of the '60s and the psycho-social "zeitgeist" of the '80s, a style that characterizes popular music of today. And Blonde Waltz brings a fresh approach to this genre that is slowly decaying into something potentially so bland, the likes of which we haven't seen since the mid- to late-1970s.

The music on this album is full of interesting contrasts. That may be what sets this band's sound apart. Guitar work as clear as clarion bells is set against Sullivan's haunting voice. Melodies floating on the wind are set against a driving, fundamental rhythm section. And on some songs, heart-wrenching lyrics are accompanied by spiritually uplifting music.

The album is passionate. "This is an emotionally honest record with sensual and danceable music," Sullivan said. "I don't want this to be throwaway music, background music, wallpaper music. I want it to last — to have meaning and substance beyond today."

The nine songs on the album are a tribute to those goals. They are soulful expressions of the dilemmas faced by lovers that inspire the listeners to dance — or, if they're shy, to at least tap their toes.

That is what rock and roll is all about.

"Everything Tonight," a darkly sensual song about the freedom in surrender, opens side one of "The Perfect Dark."

"I Love a Russian," a dance tune with political tones, is probably the only song in history that combines Chevys, Bob Dylan, Leon Trotsky, Ivan Turgenev, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Josef Stalin.

A lead guitar reminiscent of Dire Straits, a reggae-style rhythm and rough vocals make "Gettin' Used to It" a song that drips with emotion.

"Young Hearts" is a light, bouncing pop tune that provides a sharp contrast to "That's When Love Hurts," the rawest song on the album.

"They Call it Love," in which a searing solo guitar characterizes the pain, sacrifice and inherent loneliness in love, opens side two.

"Wild Boys," a song inspired by William Burroughs' book of the same name, is a glimpse into a dark urban world of the future — a world of burgeoning neo-violence in which no love can exist.

— Mick Dyer



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