



MELANIE FALK/DN

Swing Town

Brian Setzer Orchestra
to jive, wail at Omaha's Sokol

BY SARAH BAKER
Senior staff writer

It's not the first resurrection for which Brian Setzer is responsible. Setzer, who in the 1980s put rockabilly back into the mainstream with his band the Stray Cats, has been at the head of the neo-swing bandwagon and is riding into Omaha on it tonight.

Setzer brings his big-band, classic style of swing to Sokol Auditorium, 2234 S. 13th St., tonight at 7.

The Brian Setzer Orchestra, which was formed in 1992, is one of the forefathers of the recent swing revival among retro-active Gen-Xers and nostalgic parents.

The dormant genre was reborn, and Setzer's sound, along with help from the efforts of bands such as Big Bad Voodoo Daddy and Royal Crown Revue, was categorized into a movement titled "neo-swing."

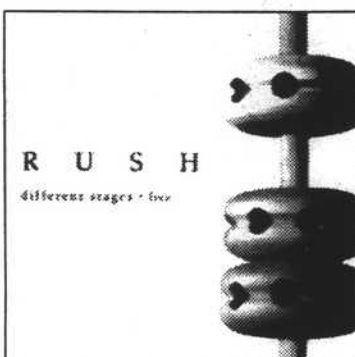
Hits include remakes of classic big-band songs, including Setzer's hit "Jump, Jive 'n' Wail."

After the release of their third album, "The Dirty Boogie," Setzer and his band launched their largest tour ever that includes 19 shows nationwide, one being tonight's Omaha gig.

Setzer's work with his current band began just after he made the final album with the Stray Cats, a band that reached fame in the '80s with rockabilly hits such as "Stray Cat Strut" and "Rock This Town."

Tickets for the Brian Setzer Orchestra show are still available, \$27.50 for general admission and \$30 for reserved balcony seats, through Ticketmaster outlets, at the Sokol Auditorium box office and at the Ranch Bowl Entertainment Center, 1600 S. 72nd St. in Omaha.

The concert begins with band 8 1/2 Souvenirs and is an all-ages show. Doors open at 7 p.m., and Brian Setzer takes the stage at 8 p.m. For more information, Call Sokol Auditorium at (402) 346-9802.



"Different Stages - Live"
Rush
Atlantic
Grade: B-

Before you celebrate Rush's demise, think carefully. You may squirm when you hear Geddy Lee's alarm-clock-like voice; you may guffaw at the topics Rush has covered in its albums; you may laugh at that Rush fan you knew in high school who constantly had a Walkman in tow. But the band has altered the face of music in ways many people cannot fathom.

Rush gave progressive rock an enduring voice. The boys have been together for more than 25 years, and they still shift musical directions every album or two. They have been the inspiration of countless hopeful drummers and bass players. And it is likely that one of your favorite bands consists of Rush junkies. Primus, Metallica, Smashing Pumpkins, Nine Inch Nails: all are professed Rush fiends.

That all said, even a huge Rush fanatic may have trouble shelling out \$20 for its latest live album, "Different Stages - Live." This is the fourth live album in Rush's career. Unfortunately, many of the songs on it can be found on its other live albums, with the exception of those released after 1989.

Another drawback for Rush is the environment a listener needs for its albums. Like a big-budget, effects-packed movie, Rush's music is more a technical marvel to listen to rather than a soulful, intimate experience. Be it at home or in a car, you almost feel you need a surround-sound system that has more graphic equalizers than a small recording studio. Anything less and the listener feels cheated.

Not to mention that three hours is a lot to demand of a listener. And "Different Stages" becomes an even greater challenge because of its utter lack of original material. With the exception of the entire rendition of "2112" and Neal Peart's mega-drum solo, most of the songs in "Different Stages" remain close, if not identical to the studio or previously released live versions.

There's still enough spots on "Different Stages - Live" to merit a purchase, however. While Geddy Lee remains a consistently engaging bassist, guitarist Alex Lifeson seems to improve on each album. And then there's Peart. In the rock world, he is still without peer, and that is only enforced on this album.

In the liner notes, the album is dedicated to Jackie and Selena. Jackie, Peart's wife, died after a long bout with cancer this year. Selena, Peart's daughter, was killed in a one-car accident in August 1997. Feel guilty for not buying the album yet?

And while Neil Peart is currently taking a hiatus to grieve, listeners can track Rush's two-hour-plus evolution from heavy-metal Zeppelin clones to ... whatever they are today.

Hard to categorize, able to provoke fans and critics alike, Rush is still engaging enough to keep listeners curious as to what direction it's taking next - just as long as its members don't don Fedora hats and zoot suits for their next concoction.

- Sean McCarthy

Very bad directing destroys 'Very Bad Things'

BY BRET SCHULTE
Senior editor

People frequently fail to distinguish the fine line between humor and gross stupidity. Based on what's been coming out of Hollywood lately, humor and stupidity are rapidly becoming one in the same.

This leads us to writer/director Peter Berg, who has created the latest monument to directorial density with his filmmaking debut "Very Bad Things."

The story line is nothing less than an overly exaggerated version of the entirely forgotten "Stag," released only a year ago, with Mario Van Peebles as the star.

Both movies tell the tale of a bunch of average Joes who happen to suffer a mishap with a hooker at a stag party and then pursue wild misadventures to avoid being caught.

Christian Slater once again reprises his ever-evolving role as an absolute jerk, and Jon Favreau ("Swingers") comes to the silver screen one more time as the large-jawed and easily convinced nice guy.

Favreau is Kyle Fisher, a bright and friendly business man who is getting married to the wedding-obsessed Laura, played by Cameron Diaz. While Laura hyperventilates over the seated folding chairs and wedding bills, Fisher is taken to Las Vegas by his friends for a final celebration of bachelorhood.

Things go awry when one of Fisher's friends, Michael (Jeremy Piven, "Grosse Pointe Blank"), accidentally kills a prostitute during some wall-pounding sex in the bathroom of their hotel.

From here the film spirals into insanity with Christian Slater's charac-

The Facts

Title: "Very Bad Things"
Stars: Christian Slater, Jon Favreau, Cameron Diaz, Daniel Stern, Jeremy Piven
Director: Peter Berg
Rating: R (language, adult content, violence)
Grade: D
Five Words: Movie is totally horrible thing

ter, Robert Boyd, taking control of the situation as a despicable amoral pragmatist. He convinces the rest of the gang to bury the body in the desert, which leads to a crazed and nonsensical murder spree that runs out the rest of the film.

But the fault lies not with the story line, which could have been made into a worthy tale of sin and punishment in an age of eroding morality. The characters are appropriately confused and easily manipulated. Boyd is powerful because he believes in something - himself. A real estate agent, Boyd lives by a Darwinistic code supported by the contemporary capitalist philosophy espoused in current self-help success books everywhere.

After a murder, he justifies their actions with proclamations of unlocking personal spirit and pursuing dreams and success - no, the film is not based on an Ayn Rand short story.

The rest of the sorry bunch, either wracked by guilt or afraid of jail, follow their friend - usually to their deaths.

Despite all this, the movie is not scary, and it certainly is not funny regardless of the meager attempts made by the cast. The movie is shot as a slapstick comedy, with the greatest yuks coming with each new murder.

But the murders aren't funny, they're sad and tragic.

Berg failed to understand the very nature of his own creation. The film essentially laughs at its attempts to be a black comedy by de-legitimizing every element of horror and making it into a farce. The only problem is the characters don't think it's funny.

They are terribly misdirected throughout the movie, and their efforts at sincerity are made to look cartoonish and careless. Murder after murder is set to a bubbly jazz soundtrack as brother turns on brother, and children are orphaned. At several points, the movie turns to a small child inflicted with multiple sclerosis for a few laughs: He falls down on his crutches and swears. Hilarious.

Even funnier was when his uncle makes fun of him and says that the boy

is only a few steps away from a Shriners' parade.

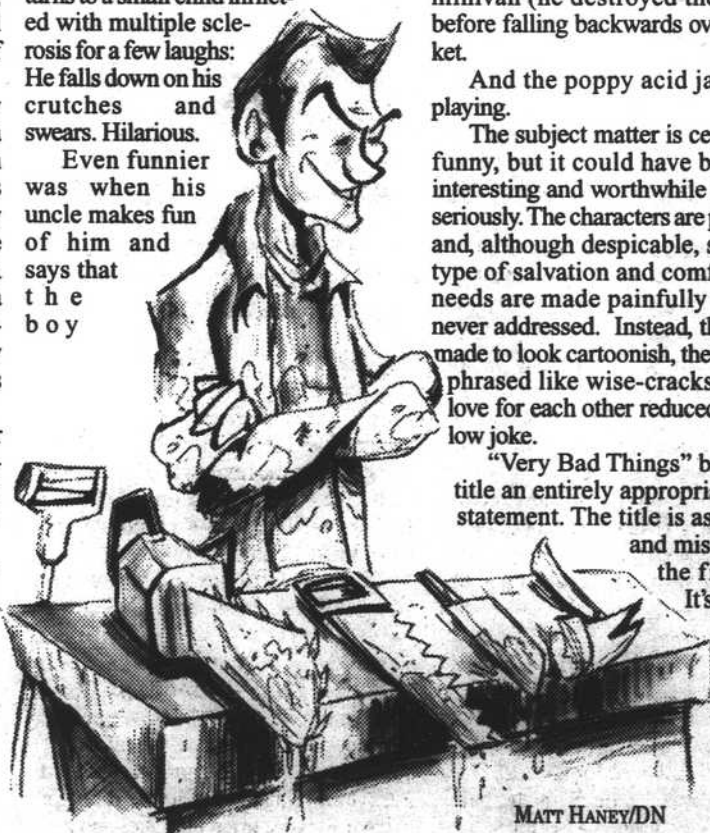
The characters' attempts at legitimacy are continually thwarted by poor and confused directing. Berg has no concept of black comedy, only gross humor. The horrific nature of the film is cheapened time and again by Berg's interpretation, which forces a frightened and truly guilt-ridden character to wail loudly and insincerely at his brother's funeral, a death for which he was responsible.

At the funeral he gropes his brother's widow and, still wailing at the top of his lungs, promises to buy them a new minivan (he destroyed the old one) before falling backwards over the casket.

And the poppy acid jazz is still playing.

The subject matter is certainly not funny, but it could have been made interesting and worthwhile if pursued seriously. The characters are plainly lost and, although despicable, seek some type of salvation and comfort. Their needs are made painfully clear, but never addressed. Instead, their fear is made to look cartoonish, their sincerity phrased like wise-cracks and their love for each other reduced to a shallow joke.

"Very Bad Things" bears as its title an entirely appropriate understatement. The title is as confused and misleading as the film itself. It's not "Very Bad"; it's terrible.



MATT HANEY/DN