

Coen fans will enjoy 'O Brother'

Oh Brother Where Art Thou



BY SETH FELTON

I was a little biased going into this movie because I absolutely loved the Coen brothers' last film, "The Big Lebowski."

"O Brother, Where Art Thou" is not the Big Lebowski. But it has the same feel, the same tone. The three main characters — escapees from a prison chain gang — are led by one Ulysses Everett McGill (George Clooney), who promises his two compatriots a share of a \$1.2 million hoard he stashed before his imprisonment.

McGill then leads the slow-witted, perpetually slack-jawed Delmar (Tim Blake Nelson) and manic, unstable Pete (John Turturro) on a quest to get back to McGill's shack before the valley is flooded in preparation for building a hydroelectric dam.

In typical Coen brothers fashion, the plot is primarily driven, not by a strong narrative direction or even character motivation, but by a series of random events, the consequences of which lead to other random events.

Thus, in their journey to the fabled treasure, they manage to record an album as the Soggy Bottom brothers, meet up with gangster George "Babyface" Nelson, break up an enormous KKK meeting (it is Mississippi in the 1930s, after all) and influence a gubernatorial campaign.

At the beginning of the film, we are told that "O Brother" is based on Homer's "Odyssey." It's been a long time since I read it, but not knowing the events of the Homeric epic does not take enjoyment from the film. Most recognizable to everyone will be the Sirens, the blind prophet and Big Dan Teague (John Goodman), the one-eyed Bible salesman who represents the Cyclops.

Most notably absent is the whole chopped-up Daddy and married Mommy episode, but that would have given the movie a slightly different flavor.

I have yet to decide what makes Coen brothers films such a riot because in all honesty, nothing really happens in them, and at the same time, we're hit with a barrage of what should be normal events. Instead, they are tilted and colored with a hint of instability, like baking soda and a drop of vinegar. It's not enough to make a complete mess; it's just enough to keep the scenes bubbling with an indescribable energy.

In some scenes, the Coen brothers add more bubble. In others, less, but they never let the instability get out of hand.

The whole movie is like a chemistry experiment, with several sub-plots being concocted separately at first. Then, slowly and carefully, like a catalyst being poured into a previously inert substance, the sub-plots are mixed into the characters' formula of events. Molecules from each substance begin to bond.

By the end of the film there are no sub-plots — the mixture finally congeals and explodes in a flash of music, crooked politics and divine intervention, and the audience is cheered and inspired by the resulting fireworks.

This is what makes "O Brother" a success: Each sub-plot is funny and quirky early in the movie, even when it doesn't seem related to the main characters at all. The movie is made that much more satisfying when each separate element comes together to multiply both the energy and comedy of the film.

Admittedly, for some this film will not click. For some, a lot of the early scenes may seem pointless. For some, it may move too slowly. Some may find the characters a little too clichéd, especially the arrogant, preening governor and his fat, sycophantic sons running his campaign. And one could say that, once again, Clooney plays a character who gets by on charm and gab, not an unusual role for him. It could be argued that he was typecast as a glib charismatic in this movie as well.

But I never noticed these things. I was too busy enjoying myself. Go see this movie; I guarantee the majority of you will come out more than satisfied.

"O Brother, Where Art Thou" Starring George Clooney, John Turturro and Tim Blake Nelson. Directed by Ethan Coen. Written by Joel and Ethan Coen. Rated PG-13 (language and adult situations) Playing at the Lincoln 3.



Courtesy Art

Flower power

Story by Sean McCarthy

Paintings, beadwork among new Noyes exhibits

The documented demise of a moon flower and detailed beaded jewelry are some of the works of art featured this month at the Noyes Art Gallery, 119 S. 9th St.

Gabrielle Moscu, whose five paintings chronicle the death of a moon flower, said she spent a year and a half thinking about the paintings but spent little time painting the oil-on-canvas work. The last painting in the series has a two-painting-in-one effect.

"I wanted to take a magnifying glass to a specific point," Moscu said.

April Stevenson, whose beads are dis-

played at the Sheldon Gift Shop, designed her beadwork on a computer before she made them. Stevenson said she preferred working with beads for the color contrast.

"I tend to like geometric, repeating designs," Stevenson said.

Stevenson's father, Bob Stevenson, also is featured in the focus gallery. Unlike April, Bob Stevenson displays works of stained glass. This is not the first time the two have had their work displayed in the same gallery. The University Place Art Center, 2601 N. 48th St., also had displayed their works.

"It's just a different creative outlet for both of us," April Stevenson said.

Along with the Stevensons and Moscu, two other artists are featured in the Focus Gallery exhibit at Noyes: Nina Szczerbowska and Glenda Dietrich. Dietrich's works feature paintings, while Szczerbowska displays still photography.

For those who want to give their homemade Valentine's Day cards an extra kick, the gallery is offering a card-making class, taught by Noyes, on Sunday from 1-3 p.m. The price for the class is \$10.

New albums hit the racks for pop fans

Jennifer Lopez misses mark with mediocre 'J. Lo'

BY ANDREW SHAW

I have this recurring dream where I'm being chased, and no matter how many alleys I run through, no matter how many fire escapes and fences I climb, she's still there, wagging her hips and flipping her hair. I don't think I'm alone in that dream.

Jennifer Lopez is everywhere.

Her latest movie, "The Wedding Planner," has topped the box office for two consecutive weekends. At the same time, "J. Lo," the follow-up album to her previous hit, "On The 6," bumped The Beatles off the top of the Billboard charts. Whether it is the effect or catalyst of her resurgent fame, Lopez also has hogged the MTV spotlight this last week. Even being mixed up with Puff Daddy's trial puts Lopez's dark eyes and curvaceous figure in the public eye where it likes to be.

Can any artist stand up to this kind of hype? Sure. Can Jennifer Lopez? No way.

Lopez first splashed onto the mainstream scene by playing the martyred main character in "Selena." She helped launch the short flashbulb trend of Latin pop, and on "J. Lo," the singer tries to continue cultivating her Latin roots while mixing in ghetto-chic, seductive ballads and hot dance numbers. What these add up to is a disastrously diverse album.

While attempting to put forth a sexy tune with "Come Over," Lopez performs one of the most boring songs ever put to silicon. To describe the song as redundant would be an understatement. The drum track rarely deviates from its minimalist groove, the bass repeats itself like the Rain Man and the openly-sexual lyrics don't incorporate anything that could be mistaken as inspiration, imagination or effort.



Jennifer Lopez

When Jim Carrey leaned over in "Dumb and Dumber" to emit what he labeled "the most annoying sound in the world," he probably never thought the sound would be challenged. Yet on "Dance With Me," Puffy produces an electronic brass hit and repeats it in machine-gun succession to bore a hole into the side of any listener's head.

The poor production of "Dance With Me" and "Come Over" describes the majority of the album, but two songs stand out as rare spotlights on the 15-track album.

"Cariño" and "Si Ya Se Acabó" show Lopez still has definite talent. Her voice shines with energy, the music swings with a classic Latin beat and the two tracks fit together to expose Lopez's best side.

Unfortunately, "J. Lo" isn't content being a Latin album. Lopez dips her toes into too many pools, trying to test the water of too many genres, only touching on the surface of most and releases a mediocre pop album.

Jennifer Lopez "J. Lo" Epic Records 2001

Vitamin C's 'More' unabashed and full of pure fun

BY ANDREW SHAW

Like a glass of orange juice or popping an herbal supplement, Vitamin C's sophomore album, "More," is easy to swallow.

Making that statement comes with a healthy amount of embarrassment and disappointment in my anti-bubblegum pop leanings, but "More" is performed with the right amount of quirk to turn me on.

Vitamin C is pure pop, unabashed and shameless. She appears in two movies ("Dracula 2000" and "Get Over It"), Tommy Hilfiger has named a lipstick color after her and Mattel is marketing a Vitamin C doll.

But she mainly bills herself as a musician. She has performed in malls across America, played at the James Caldwell High School Senior Prom and her self-titled album went platinum.

"More" has no redeeming value and doesn't try to suggest any, which makes it one of the most acceptable pop albums to come from the teen-ruled genre.

The album touts the most stereotypical pop songs ever to be written. "The Itch" combines all the essentials for a Top 40 hit into one song. At about 100 beats per minute, the programmed percussion pulses a definite beat with liberal use of stop time. At any given time, five to seven vocal tracks can be perceived, employing rich harmonies, a hard-clipping melody and one track devoted to spoken words with heavy effects.

Add brazenly sexual lyrics, some as outward as "you can't reach where I need scratchin'," others more subtle like "I need to get tricked again" or "cause I wanna go down," and you've got yourself a song that America can't stop tapping its toes to.

The same ideas are repeated on the



Vitamin C

bouncily goofy "I Know What Boys Like" and the endlessly staccato "I Can't Say No."

Although it is as typical as pop comes, "More" sounds like a low-budget pop album. The over-powering electronic instrument presence gives the album a fake and cheesy feel, but these elements of laughable and quirky sounds make "More" increasingly catchy and respectable in a sick, sad sort of way.

Vitamin C's appeal still stems from her marketability. She's got a pretty face and one hell of a body. I'm sure she has a fine voice, but with the amount of manipulation that she receives on "More," Julia Child could be a pop star. Vitamin C is not afraid of tackling sexuality head-on, even if it is the fabricated Hollywood version of what sexuality should be, and that may be where Vitamin C, like most modern pop stars, finds danger: she's an image, not a musician.

Vitamin C "More" Elektra Records 2001

'80s kings Stewart, Ritchie enter millennium with new music

BY ANDREW SHAW

Rod Stewart "Human"

A collection of 11 songs in Stewart's classic R&B style. With help from former Guns N' Roses guitarist Slash, Mark Knopfler, Macy Gray and Scottish

singer-songwriter Helicopter Girl, Stewart tries to reclaim the fans he lost with the critically defunct 1998 release, "When We Were The New Boys."

The Frogs "Hopscotch Lollipop Sunday Surprise"

Indie-freaks The Frogs release another album of delightfully offensive tunes with names like "Better Than God," "Nipple Clamps" and "Bad

Mommy."

Diamond Rio "One More Day"

These country staples release their sixth album with the title track hit single.

Public Announcement "Don't Hold Back"

The quartet that used to claim R. Kelly as a member releases their second album.

Lionel Richie "Renaissance"

The ninth solo album from the man who dances on the ceiling. "Renaissance" already has sold more than 500,000 copies in Europe