

Tunes of 'Music' will get stuck in your head

Main characters a little out of sync with reality

By Christy Lemire
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"Music and Lyrics" is a weird little hybrid of a romantic comedy that's simultaneously too fluffy and not whimsical enough.

Writer-director Marc Lawrence is definitely aiming for a retro '40s feel, with his bustling New York setting and witty characters who repeatedly burst into song.

But he's infused the movie with a forced contemporary flavoring, including a Britney Spears-style pop diva and references to performers like Shakira and Justin Timberlake, and he gets too bogged down with industry types and their business meetings.

The songs are catchy, though, especially "Way Back Into Love," the tune Hugh Grant and Drew Barrymore's characters craft together, which will be stuck in your head like a psychotic episode for days if not weeks to come. (It's playing in this particular critic's mental jukebox during the writing of this review. Somebody please make it stop.)



Drew Barrymore, left, and Hugh Grant star as unlikely songwriting partners in "Music and Lyrics."

And it's nice to see Grant aging gracefully. Yes, he's only 46, but he's learned to wear his years well. He's moved past the recent bad-boy era of the "Bridget Jones" movies and seems well aware that he's far removed from the charmingly befuddled persona on which he based his career.

That's charming in itself. As washed-up '80s singer Alex

Fletcher — formerly part of a band called PoP that's clearly and hilariously modeled after Wham! — Grant is self-deprecating but he's also not afraid to look pathetic, lonely and a little sad. It actually makes him more attractive.

A vision of PoP's heyday — a music video for their synthesized hit "PoP! Goes My Heart" — serves as the film's

side-splitting opening, as well as its high point.

Rather than being overtly campy, the video is so dead-on reflective of the genre with its big hair, skinny ties and bad key effects, you could easily imagine it playing on VHI Classic.

Alex is Andrew Ridgeley to his former musical partner's more successful George Michael type, and is now stuck playing county fairs and high school reunions to crowds of giddily nostalgic thirtysomething soccer moms.

But he also has a younger fan in singing star Cora Corman (Haley Bennett in her confident film debut), who wants Alex to write a new song for her with the title "Way Back Into Love," based on her favorite book about spirituality. (Cora takes herself very seriously but has no idea what she's talking about.)

Of course he only has a couple of days to do this, and in another contrivance of the genre, it's the cute woman who waters his plants who ends up helping him.

Barrymore's Sophie Fisher absently mutters potential lines for the song while Alex struggles with melodies at the piano.

In no time they're working side by

side, and from there it doesn't take much longer for them to end up underneath the piano, naked and rolling around (which actually sounds quite painful).

While the difference in their characters (and ages) may seem unexpected, everything about Sophie's character makes her a cliché. She's neurotic, clumsy, damaged and guarded in the wake of a bad breakup.

She also dresses in jaunty, bohemian vests and scarves. And naturally, she drowns every plant she touches.

Since this is a romantic comedy, though, there must be some arbitrary event or misunderstanding that keeps Alex and Sophie apart before their

eventual reunion (at a sold-out Madison Square Garden concert, no less).

Brad Garrett as Alex's manager and Kristen Johnston as Sophie's older sister help keep them occupied, with Campbell Scott making a brief appearance as the writing professor who broke Sophie's heart.

A lot of this romantic downtime is extraordinarily draggy, and it makes "Music and Lyrics" feel longer than its manageable running time. Every once in a while, though, it has a good beat and you can dance to it.

MOVIE REVIEW

'Music and Lyrics'

Rating: PG-13 for some sexual content

Stars: 2½ out of four

TAKE IT HOME ON CD

Madonna (Warner Bros.)

THE CONFESSIONS TOUR

Late last June, Madonna slid out a relatively unheralded (for her) but impressive live CD/DVD combo, "I'm Going to Tell You a Secret."

The release featured strong performances captured from her 2004 Reinvention Tour, which was staged to promote her 2003 CD *American Life*.

The Jonas Akerlund-directed DVD also documented her process of putting the show together with side looks at her personal life, a la 1991's "Truth or Dare."

The main thing wrong with "I'm Going to Tell You a Secret" was its timing: When it came out, Madonna had already embarked on her next tour to promote her 2005 release *Confessions on a Dance Floor*, a considerably better collection of songs than *American Life* had to offer. And last year's tour proved to be the all-time top-grossing tour by a female artist.

So now out comes "The Confessions Tour," a live CD/DVD

combo that fills in the blanks left by "I'm Going to Tell You a Secret."

The Akerlund-directed two-hour DVD catches Madonna performing at London's Wembley Arena last August, a vivid spectacle that found her riding a saddle, playing guitar (albeit rhythm guitar), running around like a deranged runway model and holding court over dancers behaving like horses.

The show is keyed to movement and complicated visual effects, dramatic mood shifts to accompany costume changes and such displays as a giant, mirrored cross from which Madonna hangs to sing "Live to Tell," a sight NBC refused to broadcast last fall when the network aired her concert.

There's so much going on that it's easy to miss the best part of the show: Madonna delivering fine live vocals to some of the greatest songs of her career.

Fall Out Boy (Island)

INFINITY ON HIGH

For a restlessly clever group that's always changing it up, Fall Out Boy

has a surprising tendency to retreat to a safe space of bland pseudo-punk.

Apparently the members of the Chicago band feel at ease in formulaic thrash and chug, even though they've clearly shown they've got the goods to be more than a warmed-over blink-182 or Sum 41.

Fall Out Boy is chained to this disparity on its new *Infinity on High*, a follow-up to 2005's breakout *From Under the Cork Tree*.

Lyricist/bassist Pete Wentz is clearly the brains of the outfit, providing singer/guitarist Patrick Stump with an arsenal of great lines on tracks with titles like "This Ain't a Scene, It's an Arms Race," "The Carpal Tunnel of Love" and "I've Got All This Ringing in My Ears and None on My Fingers."

But the talent doesn't end with Wentz. Stump is an expressive vocalist with crooner potential, and the entire band nimbly powers through numerous shifts within songs, almost always landing on piercing hooks.

Crushing rhythms, plaintive vocals, melodic choruses, inventive lyrics,

histrionic turns ... it seems nothing can stop Fall Out Boy. And *Infinity on High* is often beautifully bombastic, from the ornate gang-vocal break of "Hum Hallelujah" to the galloping passages of "You're Crashing, But You're No Wave" to the florid piano foundation of "Golden."

Plus Stump's vocal showmanship is always impressive. He's not one to waste a line like, "Thanks for the memories, even though they weren't so great."

Yet on most of *Infinity on High*'s tracks, Fall Out Boy darts to its comfort zone for both brief and protracted respites from the twisting ingenuity of its arrangements.

As a result, the artistic momentum blanches, temporarily, in a smudge of status-quo rumbling.

There's no reason for a band to balance its sound when all of its creativity is on one side of the scales.

Chicks

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1)

Association awards handed out a few months ago in Nashville: Entertainer of the year went to Kenny Chesney; the other big winners were radio favorites Brooks & Dunn, Brad Paisley, Keith Urban and Rascal Flatts.

That the Chicks weren't even nominated for a CMA award shows how narrow-minded and parochial Nashville's Music Row can be, Maines said.

"Country music, as far as radio and the industry, they are all right there on four blocks in Nashville," Maines said after the show Sunday.

The Dixie Chicks peaked at No. 36 on the Billboard country charts with "Not Ready to Make Nice." That ought to disqualify them from winning best country album, said Jacobs, the Alabama

radio station owner.

"How do you win country music album of the year, when country music radio is not playing you?" he said.

Dixie Chick Emily Robison said the Grammy organization is

known for recognizing great albums that don't necessarily get played on the radio.

"Especially in country, it does have that tradition of honoring the unsung great albums," Robison said.



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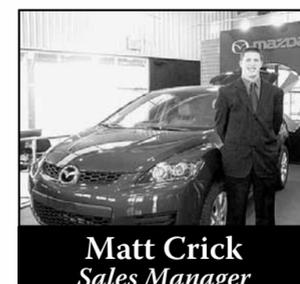
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