

# 'Crossroads': Buy the album, not the ticket

The story of "Crossroads" is a combination of Goethe's "Faust," Charlie Daniels' "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" and "The Karate Kid." The film is hampered by a muddled script, cardboard acting and pedestrian directing but the music by Ry Cooder is fantastic.

In "Crossroads" we meet Eugene Martone (Ralph Macchio), a 17-year-old guitar prodigy. Although Eugene is studying classical guitar, he prefers to play the blues. Eugene's big quest in life is to find one of the lost songs of legendary bluesman Robert Johnson and he goes to visit Willie Brown (Joe Seneca), the man who used to play harmonica for Johnson, to help him find it.

Willie agrees to teach Eugene the lost song if Eugene will help him break out of the minimum-security nursing home where he's serving the last years of a life sentence. Willie wants to go back to the crossroads where he, like several other bluesmen including Johnson, sold his soul to Scratch (a.k.a. Satan) through his assis-

tant (Joe Morton), in exchange for fame and fortune. Willie wants it back.

Along the way, Eugene and Willie team up with Frances (Jami Gertz), a 17-year-old runaway dancer on her way to Los Angeles. The threesome run into a crooked business, a crooked sheriff and deep southern racism. After Eugene falls in love with Frances and Frances leaves, Willie teaches Eugene the true meaning of the blues.

The climax of the movie comes when Willie finally finds Scratch (Robert Judd) and the two agree to a guitar battle between Eugene and Scratch's newest prodigy, Jack Butler (Steve Vai) for Willie's soul.

"Crossroads" was written by John Fusco, a recent graduate of N.Y.U.'s Tisch School of Arts. Fusco had won a couple of amateur screenwriting awards, so producer Mark Carliner decided to take a chance on "Crossroads." Walter Hill, whose previous movies include the very successful "48 HRS," the semi-successful "The Warriors," and the not very success-

ful "The Long Riders," was chosen to direct the film.

There are a few holes in the screenplay. For instance, it doesn't go into detail about Eugene and Willie crossing the ethnic, cultural and age barriers that separate them but by the end of the film, Willie and Eugene become such good friends that Eugene risks his soul to save Willie from damnation. Something must be happening off-screen because the audience doesn't get to see their relationship mature.

The actors don't do much to patch up the holes in the script. Macchio is basically the same cocky kid he was in "The Karate Kid" but he doesn't work as well with Seneca as he did with Noriyuki Pat Morita.

Seneca, who has worked in the films "Silverado" and "The Verdict," is convincing as a bluesman but doesn't get a chance to do much. Gertz, who was in the short-lived television series "Square Pegs," is not much more than a pretty face. Her part could have been played by a mannequin for all the emotion she put into it.

Judd and Morton are delightfully demonic as Scratch and his assistant but we don't get to see much of them. It's no surprise that Vai, a member of the heavy metal band Alcatraz, looks pretty good as the devil's heavy metal guitar prodigy. It's obvious that Vai is not acting.

The movie's saving grace is the music. Ry Cooder, who learned to play by hanging around great bluesmen like Lightin' Hopkins and Reverend Gary Davis, is simply one of the best guitarists in the world. Cooder understands the blues and is able to play them with reverence and virtuosity unparalleled in today's music industry. The soundtrack includes many of his great moments and I'm looking forward to it.

So if you're like most college students, you don't have too much money to spend. Spend it on the soundtrack album. You can watch "Crossroads" when it comes to cable and not feel cheated out of \$4.50.

by Karl Pallmeyer  
music reviewer

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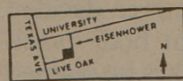
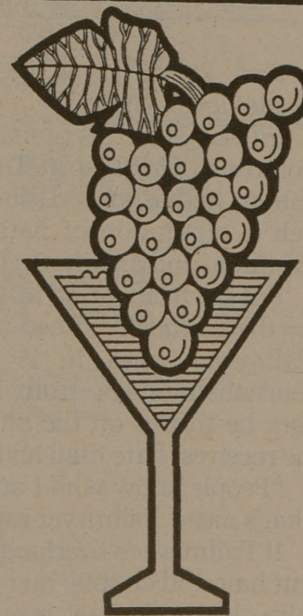
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