

The Battalion CLASSIFIED ADS

Phone: 845-0569 / Office: Room 015 (basement) Reed McDonald Building

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'Dead Again' lives up to be spine-tingling thriller

By Margaret Colman
The Battalion

Reincarnation may not be a common theme for major movies, but Kenneth Branagh tackled a fascinating, if somewhat inconsistent, story in "Dead Again" with finesse.

Movie Review

Branagh's directing debut of the much acclaimed Henry V displayed his outstanding talents as a director as well as actor. Viewers of public television are familiar with him from Masterpiece Theatre, in which he appears with his wife, Emma Thompson, who also starred in Henry V. He has an

enormous reputation to live up to, and he very nearly managed it.

The film, one of the summer's best, is set in two time periods and several lifetimes. Branagh first appears in L.A. in the black and white 1940s as Roman Strauss, an immigrant composer who is on death row for the murder of his pianist wife, Margaret, played by Thompson.

In the 90s (color now), Branagh reappears as Mike Church, a private investigator who is asked to help identify a beautiful mute amnesiac who, coincidentally is also played by Thompson. Branagh's and Thompson's American accents in the 1990s life are outstanding - it's easy to forget that they are British.

We are instantly drawn to the conclusion that the mystery woman is the unfortunate Margaret, because her tormented nightmares

in which she is mercilessly pursued.

An ex-psychiatrist of dubious mentality (Robin Williams) and an eccentric hypnotist (Derek Jacobi) help the woman uncover her past.

Her fear of being stalked only grows. Mike was there, she solemnly states. Here, the plot thickens. In hindsight, the delightful twists are obvious, but they are thoroughly enjoyable and spine-tingling.

In the culminating scene Branagh makes too much of slow motion action, and there is a tendency to overkill on one sharp symbol (those who have seen the movie know), although the ultimate justice is served.

The film may not be a classic, but it is well worth two hours to see it and contemplate the implications of karma.

Soundtrack

Continued from page 7

standard rhythm instruments, the comparison is just too obvious.

Other band members provide the vocal framework for the other tunes, and some of these come off well - Angeline Ball and Maria Doyle rip through "Chain of Fools".

All in all, the performance is top-notch. Strong certainly can put some punch into "In the

Midnight Hour," and his crooning is superb on "Try a Little Tenderness." The backing vocals by Ball, Doyle, and Bronagh Gallagher keep the music bouncing, plus there's a backing band of ten instruments, including a killer horn section.

But as it stands, the album is still a bunch of cover songs. The problem I had with the movie as

well as with the soundtrack is this: why would anyone get that excited about a cover band? The movie doesn't explain this to my satisfaction, and the soundtrack album doesn't convince me either.

Sure, the songs get a little life put back into them. But not enough to make me a bigger fan of music that's been on the shelves since before I was born.

Commitments

Continued from page 7

drew Strong) crash the stage and sing at a wedding, he hits upon an idea. Why not form a group, a collection of the local Irish talent that could perform like his favorite American soul singers, something that would bring some excitement back into the neighborhood and their own lives?

After recruiting most of the band, three backing female singers, and the vocal talents of the obnoxious Deco, Jimmy meets Joey "da'Lips" Fagin, an aging Bible-quoting trumpeter player, who claims to have played with everybody from James Brown to the Beatles.

Fagin inspires the working class group and dubs them The Commitments. At the same time, Rabitte, as manager, molds the group into an actual band. After buying some stolen equipment on credit from the local fence, the Commitments give their first show at an anti-heroin rally at a nearby church.

The show goes well, but in the weeks ahead, tensions infiltrate the group. Lead singer Deco grows an enormous ego. The fence wants his money for the equipment, while the band can't get paid for their gigs.

The various band members begin to feel themselves the most important part of the band. The Commitments lose their drummer. The Commitments gain a drummer (their former

psychotic bouncer). And despite his constant talk of the Lord, Joey Fagin is found to be sleeping with backing singers Imelda, Bernie and Natalie.

After a few weeks of gigs, The Commitments are noticed by the local press. Soul legend Wilson Pickett is going to be in town and Joey Fagin is sure he can convince Pickett to jam with the group on stage. With this news leaked out to the press, the group prepares for the show that they are sure will be the beginning of their careers.

And a half hour later, the movie ends. I'm not sure who to place the blame on for this, but it did bring an abrupt halt to everything, like finding the last few chapters in a library novel torn out.

Of course, the sheer number of characters in the movie demands a little time to properly introduce them to the audience, but I'm not sure this is really done in the movies entire two hour time span.

Too many interesting situations in the movie are never brought to any kind of a conclusion. We find out that singer Natalie (Maria Doyle) has a romantic interest in manager Jimmy, but the audience doesn't see this progress.

The band begins to be a bit suspicious of the supposed past of Joey Fagin, but only Jimmy really confronts him with it.

Parker makes some comedy out of the ineptitude of the new drummer, but at the next gig, he plays perfectly.

And for the entire film, soul music is shown as analogous to religion, in its ability to "save" the lives of the working class. This is shown as the entire reason for the band, and the reason Joey Fagin joins it.

But the theme is forgotten. Did the band do what it set out to do? Did it make any difference at all? The only answers are given in an "Animal House" type monologue by Jimmy at the very end of the film, Parkers way of tying up loose plot threads in the movie.

Despite the plot faults, "The Commitments" does contain some great music. Almost a fifth of the film is devoted to concert and rehearsal sequences that contain songs like "Whiter Shade of Pale", "In the Midnight Hour", "Mustang Sally" and "Chain of Fools". The performance sequences are what makes this movie, with Andrew Strong as Deco giving a great Joe Cocker-ish stage presence. When the concert sequences start, the movie takes on a whole new tone, and as a filmed concert, they could almost be seen as worth the price of admission by themselves. I only wish that the rest of Parker's movie didn't seem like it was made only to get these guys up on stage.



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