

AGGIELIFE

GRAND PRIX

Teenage Fanclub's new album draws on influences while carving new identity

By Kyle Littlefield
 THE BATTALION

Ah, the plight of many a good band. The musicianship is there, but the stars are just not in alignment — or the luck needed to make a band commercially successful is lacking.

Or as Raymond McGinley, guitarist for Teenage Fanclub explains, "If what you're doing intersects with the mood of the masses, you will be successful."

Grand Prix, the latest release from Teenage Fanclub, contains no evidence that the band is changing in order to please the American masses. Instead, the album finds the band writing great pop music and maturing.

Teenage Fanclub has always had an uncanny knack for writing songs that

left listeners wondering if they had heard them before. *Grand Prix* seems to stray from this tradition, which is proof the band has found its own sound.

The notable exceptions to the band's distinct

sound are "Sparky's Dream," which sounds a lot like the chiming harmonies of the Byrds, and "Verisimilitude," which could have resided on the Beach Boys' album *Pet Sounds*.

The songwriting has come a long way since the band's last album, *Thirteen*. Songs like "Tears" show that love songs are no longer the band's only forte.

Singer/guitarist Norman Blake



sings, "You're exalted and ecstatic / Your exit was so dramatic."

Although it's nice to hear a band that is not afraid to poke fun at itself, the wit of the album is, at times, overbearing.

Some of the song titles show humor and cleverness. The title "Mellow Doubt" certainly has a double meaning. If said too fast, it becomes "mellowed out," which is the mood projected as Blake sings, "It gives me pain to think of you / And all of the things together we'll never do" to the slow strum of his acoustic guitar.

"Neil Jung" — pronounced "Neil Young" — sounds like the grandfather of grunge, but actually has nothing to do with him or the famous psychoanalyst

Carl Jung.

"It's about a friend who was having a relationship with a crazy woman," Blake said in a press release.

"Sparky's Dream," a song about a cosmic love, finds bass player Gerard Love singing, "I took a wrong direction / From a shooting star / In the love dimension / Fading fast from taking this too far." The song is equipped with celestial harmonies and vintage-sounding guitars to boot.

With many songs these days being filled with cliches and words that have

no face value or deeper meaning, "Verisimilitude" is an interesting look at the human side of songwriting.

"It is an anti-dishonest love song, song," McGinley said in an interview.

The selective art of choosing words for lyrics is summed up as he sings, "I've got a pocketful of words in my brain / I pull something out when I think I should ... I'll try to find something I can give to you."

In this day of punchy, distorted guitars and blood-curdling screams that mark the resurgence of punk rock, *Grand Prix* may sound anachronistic.

However, it is indigent to times when everything was laid back, and music could be described as "pretty" without that description being a bad thing.

ALBUM REVIEW

Teenage Fanclub
Grand Prix
 DGC
 **** (out of five)

It's a small, thin, good-looking world after all Too much Disney can be dangerous

Every summer it's a new movie but the same ol' thing. *Pocahontas*, the latest Disney creation, immediately spawned a mass of followers when the trailers hit theaters.

And no wonder — Disney does a fantastic marketing job. The company's advertising blitz cannot be avoided.

Fast food restaurants offer children's menus that include Disney toys.

Radio waves and music video channels are flooded with Vanessa Williams' rendition of *Pocahontas*' theme song, "Colors of the Wind."

Hallmark is selling a line of greeting cards, stationery and party goods inspired by *Pocahontas*.

Other Disney projects are still being exploited. The stage version of *Beauty and the Beast* is a hit on Broadway and is also touring the country.

And we can't forget the Disney store. Located in malls across America, the stores give parents the opportunity to purchase Disney clothes, accessories, videos, books and toys under one roof.

Children pressure their parents enough without having an entire store devoted to Disney to rummage through. Many times, I have participated in elaborate covert operations with my family to distract my 6-year-old sister's attention away from the Disney store as we walk by.

Although we may avoid Disney at the malls, the blitz also comes by mail.

For the periodically-inclined youngster, there is the Disney Adventurers Magazine, which is read by 5 million children monthly. Subscribers can look forward to the September issue, when they can take a *Pocahontas* personality quiz to find out which character they

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COLUMNIST



are most like.

Yes, Disney has made itself quite comfortable in the marketplace.

If it wasn't busy playing the kids for every cent of their allowance, the company could train children to be good capitalists.

But with the power over such a vast audience also comes responsibility.

To its credit, Disney has tried to put a modern and realistic spin on its latest releases.

In *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle, the heroine, loved to read. This is more believable and acceptable than Snow White, who loved to clean.

But Belle's bookish appearance made it obvious that Disney was trying to make up for its shallow feminine portrayal in the past.

With Jasmine of *Aladdin*, Disney introduced multiculturalism to its previously ethnocentric repertoire. The leading couple even had Arabic noses. Yet the rest of *Aladdin*'s characters were completely Anglo.

In fact, the only people who truly looked like Arabs were the bad guys.

And now it's *Pocahontas*.

In its attempt to provide a history lesson for its audience, Disney falls short and merely exploits a folk tale.

Disney fails to accurately portray Pocahontas as one of the first American Indians to speak English and act as a translator between her tribe and the colonists.

The fact that she died in England, married to John Rolfe and never to John Smith is never even hinted at.

And the typical squaw's outfit did not, as the movie implies, have a thigh high slit, nor did it show cleavage.

In fact, all modern Disney heroines' scantily clad bodies have become alarmingly similar to Playboy centerfolds.

In *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel swam around wearing nothing but seashells, if she wore anything at all. Jasmine was practically falling out of her genie outfit in *Aladdin*. But Pocahontas wins the Penthouse Pet Award for her extremely exaggerated figure.

And Disney's men are not immune to high standards. Captain John Smith of *Pocahontas* looks just like Fabio.

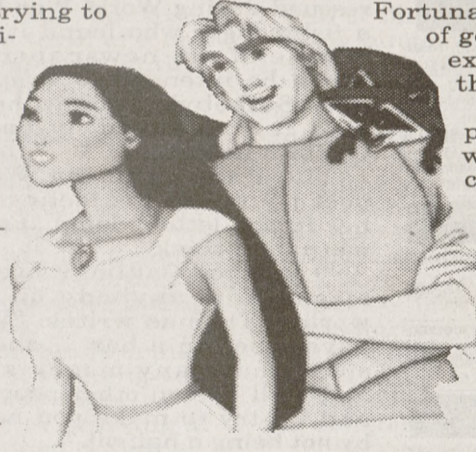
In Disney cartoons, the good guys (and girls) are always extremely attractive. The characters who do nothing are mediocre looking, and the villains are always hideously ugly.

Fortunately, this hierarchy of good looks does not exist on this side of the big screen.

There is nothing particularly wrong with being esthetically pleasing to others, but children should see that just because someone is good looking on the outside, it does not always mean that they are good on the inside.

It seems as though Disney wants to add a bit of realism to animated movies to benefit its viewing audience. But it certainly has the power to influence, as well.

This year's influence has been wasted. But maybe there will be some frumpy heroes, or gorgeous villains next summer.



Silverstone surprises with Clueless performance

By Amy Uptmor
 THE BATTALION

The basis for the movie *Clueless* can best be described in the words of its leading woman, Cher (Alicia Silverstone) — "Searching for a boyfriend in high school is as pointless as searching for meaning in a Pauly Shore movie," she says.

Director Amy Heckerling's new movie essentially is a meaningless display of high school kids trying to find love, much like her directorial claim to fame, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. And much like

Fast Times, the movie is successful with its catchy dialogue, biting one-liners and captivating characters.

The movie centers around Cher, a wealthy Beverly Hills bombshell, and her best friend Dion (Stacey Dash). Both girls are named after "great singers of the past who now do infomercials" and are friends because they know why others are jealous of them.

They befriend a rough transfer student named Tai (Brittany Murphy) and take her on as a fixer-upper "project." In the midst of their quest to find the perfect guy for Tai, Cher realizes she wants a boyfriend of her own.

The ever-picky Cher — "You see how much trouble I have picking out my shoes, and they just go on my feet," she says of the opposite sex — experiences a run of bad luck with guys such as Christian (Justin Walker), her James Dean-like dream guy. The problem is that everyone figures

out is gay, except for Cher.

It takes over half the movie for Cher to realize she is in love with her politically correct, Amnesty International T-shirt-wearing ex-step-brother, Josh (Paul Rudd). Where Cher is obsessed with coordinating the perfect outfit, Josh is more concerned with growing the perfect goatee — "you just couldn't be the only guy at the coffeehouse without chin pubes," Cher tells him. It's the perfect case of opposites attracting.

There is an obvious age gap in *Clueless* that makes it a little hard for college-age students to relate. It is

more geared toward the high school students it portrays. Nevertheless, the movie is enough of a spoof on high school mentality for people of all ages to enjoy.

The acting in *Clueless* is surprisingly good, especially considering that Silverstone is best known for her performances in Aerosmith videos. The young actress is charming and portrays a character of

considerably more substance than the movie trailers would lead viewers to believe.

Cher has a heart of gold and only wants the best for her friends. Despite her obvious ditziness, she occasionally surprises viewers with bits of intelligence. For example, she knows it was "that Pollonius guy," not Hamlet, who coined the phrase, "To thine own self be true."

The film may never be the classic film of the current high school crowd. It is not a *Fast Times* or a *Sixteen Candles*, but *Clueless* is good for a few laughs.

MOVIE REVIEW

Clueless
 Starring Alicia Silverstone and Stacey Dash
 Directed by Amy Heckerling
 Rated PG-13
 Playing at Hollywood 16
 *** (out of five)

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