

ENTERTAINMENT

THE BATTALION

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PAGE DESIGN BY JULIE BONE

TICKET
FOR ONE

All eyes on the arts

OPAS boasts classics and Yo-Yo Ma for fall season

By Allison Brown
THE BATTALION

With the beginning of a new school year, many Aggies have one thing on their mind: Fightin' Texas Aggie Football. This semester, the Texas A&M community can take pride in knowing that football is not the only thing they have to cheer about. Thanks to MSC OPAS and the Aggie Players, the fine arts should score a touchdown this season, too.

MSC OPAS is bringing the world to College Station with its 2004-05 fall season.

"I'm very excited about this season," said Jason Ford, a senior biochemistry major and director of OPAS relations. "It should be comparable to our 30th anniversary season."

Coming up in September is "The Foreigner," starring Jaston Williams and Joe Sears of "Greater Tuna," a two-man satire of a small Texas town in which they play all the characters. The duo is returning, this time joined by seven comedic actors.

"We've had Joe and Jaston here for several years with the 'Tuna' trilogy and people really, really love them," said OPAS Executive Director Anne Black.

"The Foreigner" is a comedy about an Englishman who comes to a small town for some time to reflect on his life. He pretends to be from another country and that he is not able to speak English. As the characters begin to talk freely about their darkest secrets, schemes and plans, thinking he cannot understand, a hilarious plot ensues.

"Bringing something like this to a small, conservative town should open some eyes," Ford said.

Next up on the main stage is a one-night-only performance by Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, a world-renowned dance troupe that was founded more than 25 years ago. Its newest piece, "Rooster," contains eight songs by the Rolling Stones and will be a feature of this performance.

"It should be like a good taste of 'Chicago' mixed with the Rolling Stones," Ford said.

Hubbard Street Dance Chicago will also do master classes and lecture demonstrations with the dance students in the College of Education while they are in town.

"That link back to academics is very, very high in our mission and what we're here to accomplish," Black said.

In November, Aggies can expect a treat from "Fiddler on the Roof." This Tony Award-winning Broadway musical tells the story of a Jewish family in Czarist Russia. It features such memorable songs as "If I Were a Rich Man" and "Matchmaker."

"Everyone loves 'Fiddler on the Roof,'" Ford said. "It's an all-around classic."

Last on the OPAS lineup for the fall semester is a concert by cellist Yo-Yo Ma and pianist Emmanuel Ax. The duo is only stopping in seven cities for its two-week North American tour. According to Black, this show has received the most attention of the whole season and is selling well.

"Yo-Yo Ma is the No. 1 seller," Black said. "We have taken tickets

off sale from the public in order for the students to have tickets to buy."

Wells Fargo is sponsoring the performance in order to underwrite the cost of student tickets. The price is yet to be determined.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for college students," Ford said. "It's going to sell out. I know it."

OPAS also has two performances this semester in its "Intimate Gatherings" series. The Youth Orchestra of the Americas will perform with Grammy Award-winning jazz saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera in October, and The Ahn Trio will perform in November. The "Intimate Gatherings" series is different in that artists will stay on stage to discuss their performances after the show.

While OPAS is bringing artists from around the world to campus, the Theatre Program of the Department of Performance Studies is showcasing fellow Aggies in its productions this fall. They are known as The Aggie Players, and this semester marks the beginning of their 59th season of live theater at A&M.

The Aggie Players' season starts off with a student-directed double-bill called "The Death of Innocence/Innocents." Dan Steele, a senior English and theater arts major, will direct "No Exit." Senior theater arts major and Aggie Theatre Council President, Keisha Key will direct "Patient A."

"Patient A" is the true story of a 22-year-old woman who contracted the HIV virus from a routine dentist visit. It tackles the debated issue of mandatory AIDS testing for doctors. Key said she chose this show because she thought it was relevant to the upcoming elections.

"I thought bringing this play to the stage, especially

in a more conservative community, presents another side," Key said. "It never says which side is right, but it presents the idea and lets the audience decide for themselves."

In October, former A&M student and faculty member Robert W. Wenk returns to campus to direct "The Diary of Adam and Eve." This show is the story of creation with a comical twist and is based on Mark Twain's amusing stories about Adam and Eve.

The Aggie Players' main stage production this fall is Anton Chekhov's "The Seagull," which will run in November.

Key said student attendance at these performances is important to maintain a well-rounded university, and Black agrees.

"The arts are the window through which we view the world," Black said. "They give us the ability to think, feel, and have discourse about things. Having a greater understanding of the world when you come out is really what it's all about."



PHOTO COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

James D'Arcy as Father Francis in "Exorcist: The Beginning."

The Exorcist: The Beginning Starring Stellan Skarsgard and James D'Arcy Morgan Creek Productions



ROBERT SAUCEDO

The recent prequel to 1973's groundbreaking horror film "The Exorcist" was doomed from the beginning. The original director, John Frankenheimer, dropped out of the film due to declining health that led to his death. His replacement, Paul Schrader, was allegedly fired after completion because the studio demanded a bloodier gore fest than the psychological thriller Schrader submitted. Renny Harlin was brought in as the replacement director to punch up the film a bit but instead re-shot close to 90 percent of the original movie.

It's no wonder, then, that "The Exorcist: The Beginning" is one large, clumsy, steaming pile of celluloid ca-ca. Having more in common with the Arnold Schwarzenegger action shoot-up Satan flick "End of Days" than "The Exorcist: The Beginning" relies on blood and guts where its predecessor wisely chose to utilize mood and atmosphere.

What made the original "Exorcist" so darn scary was its use of supernatural horror in an everyday setting. By setting the movie in a typical family dwelling, audiences were left with the tingling speculation that the neighborhood kid was indeed possessed by evil spirits. In "Exorcist: The Beginning," audiences are instantly thrown into a world the average theater visitor knows nothing about — East Africa. This does not instantly mark a bad movie; it simply made the job harder for the filmmakers — a job that Harlin was not able to meet.

Set in the Turkana region of Kenya, "Exorcist: The Beginning" reveals the story of the original's elder exorcist Father Merrin's first encounter with Captain Howdy, the naughty little demon that has a penchant for possessing children. Lankester Merrin (played by Stellan Skarsgard in the lone quality performance of the movie) has shed his priesthood after a crisis of faith. Called upon to lead an archeological dig, Merrin discovers a Byzantine church where one should not be. Ignoring any nagging bit of common sense, Merrin and his crew disturb a tomb that had been buried and awoken an evil that proceeds to systematically lay waste to the neighboring village.

The first film was notorious for its use of a slug-like crawl that finally paid off in a whopper of an ending. At first, the prequel attempts to create some kind of pace, but quickly loses patience with atmosphere and mood and instead seeks to scare audiences with clumsy computer graphics and cheap scares. Audiences may jump in their seats when hideously rendered CGI hyenas ravage a small child or at a gory battle scene that would make William Wallace blush, but they would also jump out of their seats if a balloon was popped in their faces. The film relies too heavily on the usage of out-of-place violence and loud noises to frighten audiences, which, unfortunately, makes the movie unsatisfying.

It's hard to take any movie too seriously when the protagonist insists on following the strict regime of Hollywood horror rules:

- 1) If you have to dig in a graveyard or enter a deserted tomb, make sure you do it at night.
- 2) Extreme close-ups of the decent demonic make-up jobs will convince audiences that bad pores are scary.
- 3) Introduce a cute monkey for a pet and then feed it to hyenas on steroids.

"Exorcist: The Beginning" is a connect-the-dot horror movie that does not deserve to ride the coattails of a classic. The cast, minus the wonderfully nuanced performance of Skarsgard, seems to be escapees of a made-for-TV melodrama and the use of bright colors defuses any atmosphere the director may have attempted. The computer graphics are pointless and clumsily executed. Some usage of unsettling angles and a haunting score help the movie in some regard, but unfortunately, it's too little, too late.

Those who enjoy traditional horror films will probably get a mild kick out of this phone-in excuse for a prequel, but audiences seeking a little meat with their blood will come out empty-handed and slightly angry with this dumbed-down flick that must have been the work of Satan.



Even a hot date and Junior Mints can't save it

Wait to see it on video

Catch the matinee

Buy tickets online

Push out your tent and camp out two nights in advance

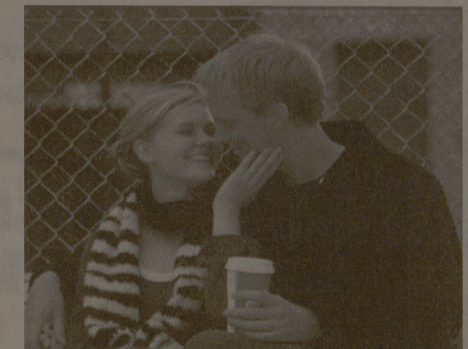


PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

for American tennis star Lizzie Bradbury (Dunst). Fueled by his newfound luck, love and on-court prowess, Peter works his way up the ranks of the tournament players and actually stands a chance of fulfilling his lifelong dream of winning the men's singles title — if his luck can hold out.

Richard Loncraine's "Wimbledon" is a tale of romance across the net. Peter Colt (Bettany) is seeded near the bottom of the world tennis ranks, but manages to score a wild card, allowing him to play in the prestigious Wimbledon tournament. There, he meets and falls



PHOTO COURTESY OF WARNER BROS.

Oliver Stone's "Alexander" is based on the true story of one of history's most luminous and influential leaders, Alexander the Great (Colin Farrell) — a man who had conquered 90% of the known world by the age of 27. The film chronicles Alexander's path to becoming a living legend, from a youth fueled by dreams of myth, glory and adventure to his lonely death as a ruler of vast Empire. "Alexander" is the story of a life that united the Known World and proved, if nothing else, fortune favors the bold.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MSC OPAS MAIN STAGE

Cellist Yo-Yo Ma (top photo) and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago (above) are among the acts scheduled for the fall season of MSC OPAS Main Stage.

FALL 2004 BIG SCREEN PREVIEW

Wimbledon

Starring Kirsten Dunst, Paul Bettany, Sam Neill & Jon Favreau
Universal Studios

GENRE: Romantic comedy

RELEASED: September 17

Alexander

Starring Colin Ferrell, Angelina Jolie, Val Kilmer & Anthony Hopkins
Warner Bros. Pictures

GENRE: Action adventure drama

RELEASED: November 5