

# 'Big Fish' reels in audience with whimsical story

'Big Fish,' the heartfelt tale of a struggling father and son relationship, teaches the value of imagination

By **Natasha Chilingirian**  
Pulse Reporter

"Big Fish" is a film that you may need to see twice to get past its silliness. The first time through, the film is an unconvincing joke, with odd fairy tale scenes that can't be taken seriously. But the ending gives a deeper meaning to the fantasies and

makes you want to start the movie over, pretend you're in a dream and feel like a kid again.

Edward Bloom (Albert Finney) raised his son Will (Billy Crudup), telling him the exaggerated truth about his past. At first, Will enjoys and believes his father's tall tales of befriending a 15-foot giant and joining a circus with a part-werewolf ringmaster, among other blatant myths. But his father, with a Peter Pan attitude, continues these tales into Will's adulthood. Will, resentful for a lifetime of lies, cuts off contact with his father. As Edward lies on his deathbed, his realist son joins him to make up and get the true story of his past.

Edward's past, as Will knows it, is shown in the form of a flashback.

Magical, whimsical filmmaking unveils the stories of Edward's past — seeing his future death in the glass eye of an old witch, traveling through a grotesque forest to a rosy town full of overtly-welcoming strangers and winning over his future wife with a field of daffodils and love letters etched in the sky. The visual glitz and glamour are a treat for the eyes, but the stories are so far-fetched that they only bring smirks instead of laughs or surprises. After seeing Edward sky-dive from an airplane and land on

top of a theater performance featuring a pair of Asian Siamese twins, it's really no shocker when he is saved by a nude female swimmer after his car is submerged underwater during a rainstorm. One outrageous scene after another gets old after awhile. Edward's courtship with his wife also fails to provoke emotion, because it heavily lacks substance — he sees her once, then three years later meets her and they start a relationship based on nothing.

It isn't until the film's finale that the pieces of the fantasy are put together into a picture of who Edward actually is. He is a romantic who puts on rose-colored glasses to gain admiration from others and make life more interesting to numb the pain from the bad hands dealt to him. He wishes for his fact-

demanding son to daydream a little and discover the happiness an imagination can bring. When Will finally does see life through his father's eyes, the film declares its purpose as a portrait of a reconciled father-son relationship.

The somewhat-dragging, fairy-tale content is worth sitting through for the film's beautiful and heartfelt result. "Big Fish" is a rarity: a fantasy movie that intermingles child-friendly images with complex feelings that adults can identify with. It makes the assertion that an adult who imagines and tells fables of pure nonsense is not just sane, but can use their imagination as a vehicle of love.

Contact the Pulse reporter at [natashachilingirian@dailymerald.com](mailto:natashachilingirian@dailymerald.com).

## MOVIE REVIEW



Alison Lohman plays the young Sandra in "Big Fish."



Scottish actor Ewan McGregor stars as the young adventurer Edward Bloom.



McGregor (left) and director Tim Burton discuss "Big Fish" on the movie set.

# Diversity, themes help Cockburn's 'Humans' remain fresh

Bruce Cockburn's timeless lyrics manage to maintain their original poignancy and message over the years

By **Aaron Shakra**  
Pulse Editor

Bruce Cockburn has been performing for more than 30 years, and depending on how you count, he released his 27th studio album in

summer 2003. Yet in many ways he remains an underground figure, especially to a younger generation so frequently deluged with popular music. So with such a sweeping breadth of work, where does one go about discovering this musician? Well, at least closer to the beginning.

"Humans" was originally released in 1980. Cockburn had already released many albums by this time, and many of the 10 songs on the recording were written in the wake of a separation with his wife. In a 1981 interview with the now-defunct High Fidelity Magazine, Cockburn said: "A lot of the songs on "Humans" came out of my

realization that I needed other people."

Lyrical, themes like these don't really lose any poignancy over time. An immediate example of this is "What About the Bond," the album's fifth track, in which Cockburn proclaims, "It's all too easy / To let go of hope / To think there's nothing worth saving / And let it all go up in smoke." This is a timeless idea, really. Cynicism is both an excuse and escape when it comes to confronting the surmounting problems of this planet. It's the easy way out, and Cockburn captures this perfectly.

Another track, "Guerrilla Betrayed," recalls the futility of violent

protest against already unjust actions. The idea here is that violence can only beget more violence and propagate a cycle of death. He repeats this sequence of lines throughout the tune: "We thought we could change something / We helped them win / We changed the slogans / We get hunted again / When you're the fighter / You're the politician's tool / When you're the fighter / You're everybody's fool."

The diversity of the musical styles also helps the age of the album. While the sound production has a cultural footprint of the 1980s, the remaster surely helps bring out all the instru-

ments, and other than this, "Humans" is simply a rollicking reggae, rock, folk album. Cockburn's studio musicians keep this from becoming a straightforward studio record; especially notable is Hugh Marsh's tasteful violin playing.

A remaster of the album was made available last November and includes a live version of "Grim Travellers." Whatever version of the album you manage to track down, it's a good start.

Bruce Cockburn comes to the WOW Hall on Feb. 24. Tickets are \$31.50 in advance and \$34 at the door.

Contact the Pulse editor at [aaronshakra@dailymerald.com](mailto:aaronshakra@dailymerald.com).

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