

■ Movie review

Wes Craven's predictable plot brings nothing new to horror movie genre

BY RYAN NYBURG
PULSE EDITOR

Wes Craven's "Cursed" continues the seemingly endless string of bland horror films released since the end of December, adding nothing new to the pile of unmitigated crap that moviegoers and sad-sack film critics have been exposed to over the past two months.

While Craven's name has become associated with several creative horror films, it has been associated with some atrociously boring works as well. Ever since his break-out film, "Last House on the Left," in the early 1970s, Craven has run hot and cold over the entire horror cinema landscape. Occasionally he'll turn in a boldly original and genre-defining piece of work, such as "A Nightmare on Elm Street" or "Scream," but then he'll follow it with a long string of what can only be called hack work, such as "Vampire in Brooklyn" or "Scream 2."

"Cursed" falls with a sickening thud in the latter category, with every mediocre second of it feeling like a painfully tired cliché. Starring the woefully miscast Christina Ricci, the

film deals with an outbreak of werewolves in Los Angeles. Since it plays the horror movie game by rote, watching the film becomes a matter of counting down to the obligatory plot points and character revelations. One, two, three, guy behind the door; one, two, three, she's really a werewolf.

The main plot thrust is that Ricci and her brother Jimmy (Jesse Eisenberg) get in a car crash on Mulholland Drive. A driver in another car is dragged off by a wolf and the siblings are both bitten while trying to save her. They then have to come to terms with their budding lycanthropia.

The film takes absolutely no chances with the werewolf genre, playing everything straight. Here's a gypsy fortune teller, here's a weird mark on the hand, here's an absurd amount of full moons occurring in a single month. When Jimmy starts looking up books on werewolves and begins quoting unnamed "experts" about how the process works, it feels as if the filmmakers just shrugged and decided they couldn't come up with anything more original.

Scripted by "Scream" screenwriter

Kevin Williamson, the film pays homage to the Lon Chaney Jr. classic, "The Wolf Man," but never tries to break free of that film's overarching mythology. Apparently the intervening 64 years of progress, with such films as "The Howling," "An American Werewolf in London" and "Wolfen" creating whole new ways to look at werewolves, have not made enough of a dent in Williamson's imagination for him to come up with something creative. By the time a werewolf seems to be defeated but then pops up and is shot in the head, it becomes obvious that nearly everyone involved has completely run out of ideas.

Williamson has always been a one-trick pony in any case. The meta-horror of "Scream" seems like a fluke in retrospect, after nearly a decade of diminishing returns. The complete lack of imagination expressed in "Cursed" shows that both Craven and Williamson might be better off not making any more films together. Or any more films at all, for that matter.

ryannyburg@dailymerald.com

Performing under PRESSURE

The Jazz Café is a venue for an array of musicians to showcase their talents in a mostly unrehearsed format

BY AMY LICHTY
PULSE REPORTER

The talents of jazz musicians such as John Coltrane and Miles Davis have been celebrated for years. At the University, many more jazz musicians are waiting for the same recognition, but they'll have to first showcase their talents — both prepared and improvised — at the Jazz Café on Friday.

"The Jazz Café has been in existence for many years, and it's been a showcase for our student combos," Jazz Café faculty adviser Mike Denny said.

The School of Music hosts the Jazz Café twice per term, with about half of the approximately eight combos performing at each show. Ranging in size from four to eight musicians, the groups perform traditional jazz repertoire as well as original compositions.

"We just wanted to create an environment that would be great for everyone to do this in, to perform and enjoy it in a place that's a little more than just hanging out," jazz studies Director Steve Owen said. "We thought it'd be a great idea for us to just go ahead and have an informal place to have our combos play on campus, so we just kind of take over a room and allow our combos to have concerts. One of the things that's nice about it is that we have people involved in it who are very advanced players as well as some who are just starting out."

Improvisation is an important element of jazz, and although the groups will be performing pieces composed by famous jazz musicians, including Charlie Parker, Benny Golson, Jerome Kern, Bronislaw Kaper and Davis, much of the music is created unrehearsed and on the spot.

"Improvisation is a blast. It really makes people be aware of the building blocks of music and be able to manipulate them kind of spontaneously," Owen said. "It's really fun to see people do it and the reason for the Jazz Café was to find a place

to allow people to do this at all levels. It may be fun, but it's also encouraging. Sometimes, when you're in a concert hall, (improvising) can be kind of daunting, and we wanted it more informal than that."

Instrumentation includes some combination of the rhythm section — piano, bass, drums and guitar — and the horn section — saxophones, trumpets and trombones. Occasionally, the combos will feature a vocalist or violinist.

As an actual class for which undergraduate and graduate students enroll, the combos — usually led by a graduate teaching fellow or a faculty adviser — stick to the jazz they've been studying all year long.

"We have some undergrads working with graduate students as performers in the ensemble, and it's a lot looser than a recital," Denny said. "And it's worked out really well — we put tablecloths and candles out and serve light refreshments. We try to create a café atmosphere so it's not as formal as a typical recital."

Although the environment is that of a comfortable café, there are those times when musicians have trouble handling the pressure, especially when it comes to improvising.

"I call it the 'Crash and Burn Phenomenon,'" Owen said. "Sometimes it's just fun to see how these performers are going to do and if they're going to make it through. There's an element of danger to the whole thing. I've seen some really outstanding musicians get up there and then sometimes it just doesn't click. But other times, you can get people who can really play almost beyond themselves and overall, everyone does really well."

The music starts at 8 p.m. in room 178 of the School of Music. Tickets can be purchased at the door for \$5 general admission and \$3 for students and seniors.

amylichty@dailymerald.com

Future Music Oregon

Jeffrey Stolet, director



Featuring a single one-hour piece by guest artist Carl Stone, *Guelaguetza*, which was composed in 1996 and commissioned by the Bay Area Composers Forum. Stone, one of the pioneers of live computer music, has been hailed by the Village Voice as "the king of sampling."

Saturday, March 5 8 p.m.

Room 198, UO School of Music

TICKETS: \$5 General Admission, \$3 Students & Senior Citizens; available at the door. Room 198 is wheelchair accessible



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