

ALONG CAME A SPIDER-MAN

Adam J. Manley

The Clackamas Print

Three villains. Five plotlines. One monumental success for everyone's friendly neighborhood Spider-Man.

Traditionally, the third movie in a comic book franchise tends to be a disappointment. Just take a look at *X-Men: The Last Stand*, *Batman Forever* and – arguably the worst of the bunch – 1983's *Superman III*.

At first glance, *Spider-Man 3* seems poised to follow its third-child predecessors into the land of movies that fans pretend don't exist. Third movies of this genre typically hit giant potholes – and plot holes – in the form of too many villains, too many convoluted plotlines, money-grubbing studio interference and the absence of whatever talented director made the first two movies successful.

Spidey's latest encore skillfully swings its way around such foibles: Sam Raimi returns to the franchise for a third time – a rare feat for directors of comic book films – taking on the challenges of numerous villains and dangling plotlines and weaving them into a surprisingly organized and intricate story.

It is true that *Spider-Man 3* fails to surpass the majesty of Alfred Molina as Doctor Octopus, the

drama of Peter Parker hanging up his tights, or any other element of the prior sequel. To be fair, however, *Spider-Man 2* set the bar unrealistically high. Moreover, that movie didn't have to contend with the problems of tying up loose ends while coping with several brand new plots.

At the beginning of the new installment, the much-maligned and misunderstood Spidey of past movies is long gone: the city loves him now, and even J. Jonah Jamison can't call him a crook anymore (as much as he'd like to). He's preparing to propose to Mary Jane, who's found her own success starring in the premiere of a Broadway musical. And on top of all that, the web-head is about to be issued the key to the city.

Unfortunately, it's all downhill from there: between iconic Spider-Man staples such as the black symbiote, The Sandman and Eddie Brock – the man better known as Venom – Spidey's life is already thrown into turmoil.

But then there's still the ongoing storyline of former pal Harry Osborn's

grudge against the web-slinger and yet another tension-filled plot surrounding Mary Jane.

That's a whopping five plotlines in a franchise that previously had, at most, three simultaneous plots.

It's the miracle of this movie, really. The first Spider-Man

movie stumbled its way hazily through the balance between the original story and the Green Goblin. This installment, on the other hand, maneuvers carefully through a number of interconnected relationships and events with incredible grace.

With that considered, this movie is absolutely amazing – vastly superior to the first installment, and not too far behind the second. If the franchise were to end here – it doesn't have to, but it could – Spidey could gloat that he survived the comic book trilogy curse unscathed.



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Spider-Man (Tobey Maguire) strangled and at the mercy of supervillain Venom (Topher Grace) in the latest movie in the franchise, *Spider-Man 3*, which opens on May 4.

Spektor haunts audience with music

Megan Koler

The Clackamas Print

The unconventional turns mainstream as the MTV teens begin to plead for the talented rather than the flashy.

Arguably the most popular and-coming alternative artist, Regina Spektor, played to a sell-out Crystal Ballroom last week.

It is encouraging that an artist like Spektor can sell out a venue like the Crystal Ballroom, which holds about 1,500 people, in a week. A quick look at the tickets on eBay is a credit to her blossoming mainstream appeal.

The money would have been worth it, because at the

change of light sound, the crowd would go nuts and die down, and do the same thing over and over again two hours. It was extremely exciting for a small woman who got started listening to cassettes of Queen and the Beatles in communist Moscow.

Spektor, who emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States in 1989, self-released her first two albums in 2001 and 2002, entitled *11:11 Songs*. By 2004, she had signed with Merge Records and came out with *Soviet Kitsch*. Her earlier albums are a smorgasbord of styles and genres.



SPEKTOR

Internet Photo

She has the range to sing almost anything and she opts for shaking things up and experimenting with what her voice is capable of. It is possible that she has turned off a lot of mainstream listeners with her obscure literature references and random moaning and warbling; they missed out on a lot.

Spektor's latest album, *Begin to Hope*, released last year, includes new recordings of older songs and a few songs that are more MTV-friendly than songs from her other albums. Even though it seems she has been working with a more traditional song formula, her pieces are still as moving and novel as when she first started.

Despite the success of *Begin to Hope*, Spektor sang many of her earlier songs to start

out with, including hilarious renditions of "Music Box" and "Baby Jesus." She also wowed the audience when she sang "Poor Little Rich Boy" while playing piano and drumming on the chair next to her in perfect unison.

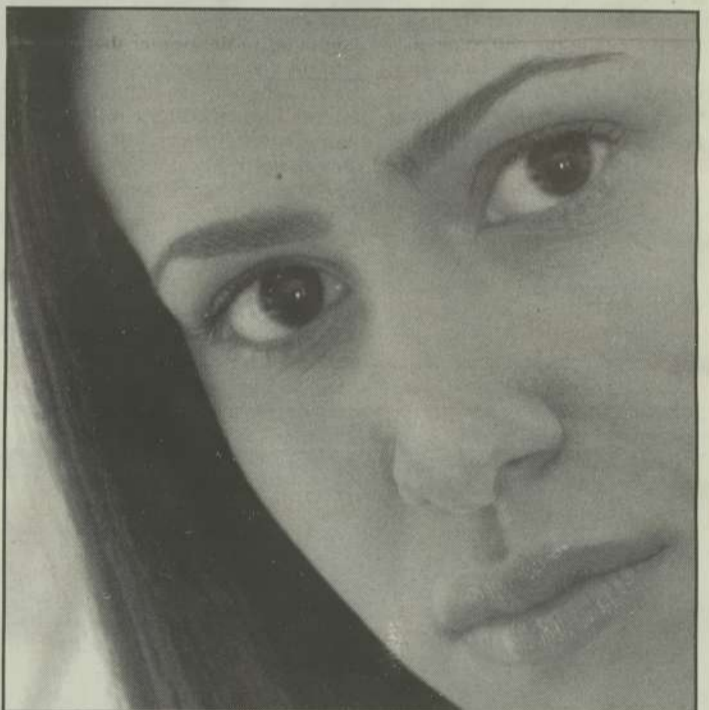
She left her makeshift one-man band, for a few songs, to try a couple of sets on her gorgeous aqua electric guitar, but not before she asked sweetly that the weed smokers please cease their smoking before she "barfs."

After she forgot the lyrics to "That Time" for the second time, she laughed and said, "I blame this on the weed smokers!"

After playing a particularly chilling version of "Summer in the City," she bowed and left the stage only to be called out for a much desired encore. Spektor, who has often expressed admiration for The Beatles, played a slower and softer version of John Lennon's song "Real Love."

Spektor ended the night with the fan favorite "Samson"; it seemed that the fans were not going to let her leave without singing this song.

For an artist that had a hard time selling tickets in Portland last December, she certainly had her fans in Oregon on their knees begging for more this time around.



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