

More Fire

The white hot life of Joe Strummer

JOE STRUMMER: THE FUTURE IS UNWRITTEN: Directed by Julien Temple. Cinematography, Ben Cole. Music, The Clash. Starring Joe Strummer, Mick Jones, Bono, Steve Buscemi, John Cusack, Johnny Depp, Jim Jarmusch and Matt Dillon. IFC Films, 2007. R. 123 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

I remember the first time I heard it. I was in my bedroom, the cassette of *London Calling* on loan from a classmate. The cover is ominous, depicting a bass guitar held aloft by its owner just before he annihilates it. The music, more than an hour of it, is equally shattering. An unprecedented mix of punk, rockabilly and ska, *London Calling* was transformative — for The Clash, it earned them the moniker “The Only Band That Matters” — but never more so than the opening song, the thrillingly immediate title track. “London Calling” is the aural equivalent of helicoptering over a cliff. Sasha Frere-Jones, the *New Yorker* music critic, once wrote of it, “If you can listen to it without getting a chilly burst of immortality, there is a layer between you and the world.”

Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten is a fitting tribute to the singer and lyricist for The Clash, who died suddenly in 2002 of a heart attack. It has an all-access, authoritative feel, due in large part to the volume of richly preserved archival footage, as well as to audio clips from Strummer’s stint as a DJ for the



BBC World Service. Fiercely anti-establishment, Strummer was also something of a changeling, renaming himself Woody during the student protests of the 1960s and Joe for his tenure with the Clash. (His actual name was John.) For a rock star, albeit an unlikely one, he was always eminently quotable, and by all signs he was smart enough to be comfortable with life’s contradictions. As a young

man, he felt art school was “the last resort for malingerers and bluffers,” so he promptly enrolled in art school. He joined several bands, content to play rockabilly until the arrival of

the Sex Pistols, an event he likened to tossing “a grenade into the room” of rock music.

Unfortunately, director Julien Temple (*Absolute Beginners*) tries too hard to subvert the traditional documentary format. Temple, best known for the most memorable videos of the early MTV era, from ABC to the Kinks to ZZ Top, creates a frenzied, mashed-up feel that appears gimmicky and incoherent. In the

first eight minutes alone, Temple uses still photos, newsreels, cartoons, home movies, early film sequences, promotional/tourism footage and a click-wheel viewfinder to set up his story. It’s confusing and completely disorienting. The good news is that by the end of the first act, Temple abandons most of these techniques altogether. Once that happens, *Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten* takes off.

The other Temple idiosyncrasy worth mentioning ultimately proves successful. Instead of filming his contributors in the typical Ken Burns style — which is to say, seated and indoors, their faces viewed in close-up — Temple instead assembles Strummer’s many family, friends and collaborators around bonfires outside of L.A., New York and London. That’s correct: bonfires. My first reaction, at least until Bono and Johnny Depp showed up, was, Why are homeless people being interviewed about Joe? My second reaction was, Were no buildings available? But slowly, the gatherings take on a family-campfire feel as the participants play Clash and Ramones songs together. None of the contributors are named at any point, a matter I found mildly annoying, but after a while the format grows on you. Other than a few misfires, *Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten* is an arresting tribute to a true artist, a man wise enough to have said, “If I knew what I was after, I probably wouldn’t bother to go after it.”

Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten opens Friday, Dec. 7, at the Bijou.

movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING:

Behind the Mask: Documentary about people who take direct action to save animals from laboratory experiments screens with an appearance by Peter Young, a former animal liberation prisoner. 6 pm Dec. 6, 180 PLC, UO. Free.

Best of the Video Slam: One-night festival features audience favorites from slams held in 2007, including Henry Weintraub’s “Split,” two films by Jesse England and Nancy Miller’s “Untitled Documentary.” The audience will help choose the Grand Slam winner for the year. 7 pm Dec. 8, DIVA. Free.

Black Sheep: If you can see this film’s image of an evil sheep trying to bite someone’s ear off and not laugh, you’re made of stronger stuff than I. When a genetically altered lamb is released into a New Zealand farmer’s flock, the sheep turn into vicious flesh-eaters. Also, one of the characters has a sheep phobia. With effects by WETA Workshop. Ooh, neat! R. 87 min. Bijou LateNite.

Double Team: Jean-Claude Van Damme and Dennis Rodman in a film that has a mere 11 percent freshness rating on Rotten Tomatoes? Plenty to mock here, right? Screens as part of the Heckler’s Movie Night series, 7 pm Dec. 12, Wandering Goat. Free.

Feast of Love: Director Robert Benton’s (*Kramer vs. Kramer*) adaptation of Charles Baxter’s novel was filmed in Portland, and stars Morgan Freeman as a professor watching his neighbors (Greg Kinnear, Selma Blair, Radha Mitchell and others) fall in and out of love. R. 102 min. Movies 12.

Feel the Noise: After he gets in trouble in his New York neighborhood, a young man is sent to Puerto Rico, where he discovers his stepbrother shares his dream of making it big in the music world. A gorgeous dancer helps the pair get on their way. Produced by Jennifer Lopez. PG13. 113 min. Movies 12.

Golden Compass, The: I’m having to restrain myself from writing this movie’s title in all caps and jumping up and down, screaming, “It’s here it’s here it’s here!” Yes, it’s that exciting. The film, based on Philip Pullman’s utterly brilliant novel, is an adventure through a world much like our own — but not. Everyone has an animal companion who’s part of themselves, and one little girl (newcomer Dakota Blue Richards) is the key to saving not just her own world, but countless others as well. With Daniel Craig, Nicole Kidman, Sam Elliott and Eva Green. PG13. 113 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten: Julien Temple’s documentary about the life of the Clash’s singer and lyricist has some stylistic quirks, but ultimately it’s an interesting, fitting tribute to a musical icon and influence. R. 123 min. Bijou. See review this issue.

Sleuth: Go see this brief, clever, stagey film to watch Michael Caine and Jude Law, as a wily writer and the young fellow ostensibly shagging the older’s wife, spar and toy with each other. It’s a bit too stylish, set-wise, and a bit shallow, but it’s still an entertaining excuse to watch actors enjoying their craft. R. 86 min. Bijou. See review this issue.

This Christmas: For the first time in years, the whole

Whitfield clan is heading home for Christmas — meaning there’s got to be some drama and tension between siblings. “An overstuffed but satisfying Yuletide comedy-drama with a fine cast,” said *Newsday*; that cast includes Delroy Lindo, Loretta Devine, Idris Elba, Regina King and Mekhi Phifer. PG13. 117 min. Cinemark.

Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com

CONTINUING:

Across the Universe: Julie Taymor (*Titus*, Broadway’s *The Lion King*) puts her ambitious but unsatisfying spin on a love story built around Beatles songs, following a young man (Jim Sturgess) and the girl he falls for (Evan Rachel Wood) amid the tumult of the 1960s. PG13. 131 min. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (10/18)

American Gangster: Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe face off in the story of 1970s driver turned drug lord Frank Lucas (Washington) and the cop investigating Lucas and his unexpected rise to power. Directed by Ridley Scott. R. 157 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (11/8)

August Rush: Keri Russell and Jonathan Rhys Meyers star as a musical young couple whose love story encounter produces a child. Orphaned “by circumstance” (says the description), the boy (Freddie Highmore) grows up to become a musical prodigy. PG. 113 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Awake: Pretty young things Hayden Christensen (*Star Wars* Episodes I-III) and Jessica Alba (*Sin City*) star in this thriller about a young man who experiences creepy, crazy things while under the knife (but completely aware) for a surgery. R. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Bee Movie: Not much looks all that sweet about this animated comedy, in which Jerry Seinfeld voices a recent bee college graduate who learns, to his shock, that humans have been stealing bees’ honey for ages and ages. With the voices of Renee Zellweger and Matthew Broderick. PG. 90 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Before the Devil Knows You’re Dead: Sidney Lumet’s new film is being hailed as a return to form by many, but there’s something unsatisfying in the bleak tale of two brothers whose attempt at robbery goes terribly, devastatingly wrong. Stars Philip Seymour Hoffman, Ethan Hawke and a raging, quiet Albert Finney. R. 117 min. Bijou. ★★☆☆☆ (11/29)

Bella: A bad day for two people — one a former soccer player, the other a pregnant waitress — results in an unexpected connection. “A heart-tugger with the confidence not to tug too hard,” said Roger Ebert. PG13. 100 min. Cinemark.

Beowulf: Robert Zemeckis, working from a screenplay by Roger Avary and Neil Gaiman, directs this version of the story of the warrior Beowulf, with Ray Winstone in the title role and Angelina Jolie as Grendel’s mother. Reviews are good, but it still looks like a video game. PG13. 114 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (11/21)

Bourne Ultimatum, The: “I remember everything,” says Matt Damon’s Jason Bourne in this film’s action-packed trailer. Director Paul Greengrass and the major players (Joan Allen, Julia Stiles) return to the series’ satisfying third installment, which finds Bourne hunting down his past in stunning locations. PG13. 111 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (8/9)

Dan in Real Life: Poor Dan (Steve Carrell) is an advice columnist with a passel of daughters whose life is further complicated when he falls for his brother’s girlfriend (Juliette Binoche). Also, the brother is played by Dane Cook. PG13. 99 min. VRC Stadium 15.

Dragon Wars: The good: Dragons! In L.A.! The bad: The plot is a convoluted thing about magical powers, resurrected lovers and a dragon that will be able to ascend into heaven. Also, the biggest names in the cast are Jason Behr (*Roswell*) and Robert Forster. But still ... dragons! In L.A.! Can it be better than *Reign of Fire*? PG13. 90 min. Movies 12.

Enchanted: Beautiful princesses! Handsome princes! And ... midtown Manhattan? Amy Adams (*Junebug*), James Marsters (*X-Men*) and Patrick Dempsey (*Grey’s Anatomy*) star in this fairy tale in the real world, which follows Princess Giselle (Adams) after a wicked witch banishes her from her magical kingdom. Why does this Disney flick look so charming? PG. 107 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Fred Claus: So what if Santa had a brother? Who happened to be the opposite of the saintly gift-giver: a repo man? That’s the basic premise of this film, but the reason people will see it, I suspect, is for Paul Giamatti in a Santa suit getting in a fight with Vince Vaughn. PG. 116 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Good Luck Chuck: Chuck (Dane Cook) has a hex on him: every girl he dates finds true love with the *next* guy she dates. Enter Cam (Jessica Alba), a klutzy sweetheart Chuck falls for hard. Clearly, he’s got to wiggle out from under his strange curse. R. 101 min. Movies 12.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix: The Ministry of Magic is in denial about the return of Lord Voldemort, Hogwarts get a nasty new teacher and Harry ... Harry’s in one kind of trouble or another throughout the mostly successful and only slightly disappointing fifth HP film. It’s not quite *Prisoner of Azkaban*, but it’s getting there. PG13. 138 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (7/19)

Hitman: Timothy Olyphant, go back to *Deadwood*! No, kidding, kidding. But honestly, I’m not sure this videogame-based film about a professional assassin trying to find out who set him up (wait, does this remind anyone of Jason Bourne?) is the best place for you. R. 100 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Labyrinth: Don’t make me start singing the song. You know which one I mean. And don’t miss a screening of this shiny new print of Jim Henson’s *Labyrinth*, one of the most wonderful movies of the 1980s. Jennifer Connelly! David Bowie in tights! Goblins, fairies and talking worms, oh my! PG. 122 min. Bijou LateNite.

Martian Child, The: John Cusack continues to drag his formerly youthful cinematic persona into adulthood with this film about a man who adopts a boy who claims to be from Mars. With Amanda Peet and the always-wonderful Joan Cusack. PG. 108 min. Movies 12.

Mist, The: I keep wondering what’s next. *The Cloud? The Hailstorm?* Stephen King can make monsters out of anything, right? Frank Darabont directs this adaptation of a King short story about a creepy mist that hides even creepier creatures. R. 124 min. Cinemark.

Mr. Magorium’s Wonder Emporium: This story about a magical toy store, its owner (Dustin Hoffman) and the young shop employee who might inherit it (Natalie Portman) is written and directed by Zach Helm, who also wrote last year’s *Stranger Than Fiction*. G. 94 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

No Country for Old Men: The latest from the Coen brothers is a near-masterpiece, an adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s acclaimed novel, and it’s earning plenty of acclaim itself. The story involves a small-town sheriff, a deadly drug deal and a psychopathic killer (Javier Bardem). The reviewers say “intense,” “searing,” “an evil delight.” R. 122 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (11/29)

Ratatouille: The latest animated film from Pixar is directed by Brad Bird (whose *The Iron Giant* is too often overlooked) and concerns a big-dreaming rat who wants to be a chef. When he makes a deal with a garbage boy, the culinary world of Paris gets far more than it ever imagined. G. 110 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (7/12)

Stardust: Matthew Vaughn (*Layer Cake*) takes a firm and steady hand to the many plot threads of this adaptation of Neil Gaiman’s novel about a fallen star with an attitude and the many characters seeking her. Wicked and charming, sweet and sly, with a stellar cast and a superb sense of humor. PG13. 128 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (8/9)

Superbad: Judd Apatow and Seth Rogen both have fingers in this pie, as co-producer and co-writer, respectively. It’s the story of two high school friends, Evan (Michael Cera, *Arrested Development*) and Seth (Jonah Hill), who are trying — well, in classic teen movie fashion, they’re trying really hard to get laid. They’re about to go off to college; what do you expect? R. 114 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (8/23)

3:10 to Yuma: Russell Crowe and Christian Bale costar in this solid Western from director James Mangold (*Walk the Line*). Based on a short story by Elmore Leonard that was made into a film in 1957, the film follows a vicious outlaw (Crowe) and the Civil War vet (Bale) who’s volunteered to get the thief to the train that’ll take him to trial. R. 117 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (9/13)

Underdog: Jason Lee voices the titular canine, who finds himself superpowered after an incident in the lab of mad scientist Simon Barsinister (Peter Dinklage). Bad guys have plots, but Underdog has a spaniel to impress! Oh, and the day to save. PG. 84 min. Movies 12.