

FORTE! FORTE! FORTE!

Whiplash pushes the pursuit of musical greatness to an unsettling but rewarding extreme

As Terence Fletcher, longtime character actor J.K. Simmons fuses bits of the roles he's best known for — the warmth of Juno's dad (*Juno*), the shoutiness of Peter Parker's boss (*Spider-Man*) — into one glorious wreck of a man. Fletcher is the tyrannical leader of the best jazz band in the finest music school in the country: He shouts, he intimidates and he humiliates, and he does it all with the firm belief that his students (disappointingly, they're all male) will benefit from it. There is no "good job" with him. There's excellence, or there's out the door with your music stand between your legs.

In many ways, Fletcher is the worst, and yet he's the person Andrew Neyman (Miles Teller) wants to impress. Neyman's a talented, driven drummer, yearning to be recognized, to be the best; but he's such an asshole about it that he can't treat his girlfriend, Nicole (*Glee*'s Melissa Benoist), like a person, because he's so sure she'll never understand.

Paul Reiser has a small role as Neyman's dad, and Benoist is

quite good in an underwritten part, but *Whiplash* is a duet, a complex, sometimes dissonant piece for two voices: teacher and student, musician and conductor, talent and rage. If occasionally the movie works too hard to manufacture dramatic points, that's easy enough to forgive in the face of the performances writer-director Damien Chazelle (*Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench*) draws from his stars, and the snappy way he sets the pace, ricocheting from practice scene to performance, all the while escalating the tension between Neyman and Fletcher. Neyman is sullen and obsessed, Fletcher vicious and righteous; neither of them are entirely right about anything, except, maybe, their love of music — something that gets buried under competition and insecurity.

This isn't a movie about mythologized genius, or a story that excuses cruelty when it comes in the pursuit of greatness; every triumph is tempered with the knowledge of what it took to reach that moment. Fletcher pushes, Neyman lashes back, and their duet rages on, right up to the unsettling, satisfying close. (*Bijou Metro*)



Dear White People

Dear readers: Go see this movie. No film in recent memory addresses racial tensions in the U.S. with the contemporary candor and humor of *Dear White People*, a debut for director Justin Simien. Set smack in the middle of a brewing race war at the fictional Ivy League Winchester University, the dark comedy's reluctant leader Samantha hosts campus radio show "Dear White People" (which doles out advice like "the minimum requirement of black friends needed to not seem racist has just been raised to two"). And it's sure making some white folks uncomfortable, including the university president's son Kurt. Kurt acts out by throwing a "black-themed" party for Halloween complete with blackface and watermelon. A shit storm ensues. Simien makes it easy to laugh at these seemingly cartoonish examples of racism. But how cartoonish are they? Instances of blackface and other bigotry are all too common in Oregon. While the film feels unfocused at points, it tackles the big white elephant in the room — and the politics of sexuality and class — with grace and wit. (*Bijou Metro*)

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 Mo-We 2:35, 5:00, 7:30, 10:00
 Thu 12:10, 2:35, 5:00, 7:30, 10:00

ROSEWATER Fri-Sun 12:00, 2:15, 4:40, 7:05, 9:25
 Mo-We 2:15, 4:40, 7:05, 9:25
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