

Critical Mass Movie Reviews

by Chris Carnicelli

“The Magnificent Seven”

In the unceasing, unstoppable Hollywood parade of remaking movies, here's a remake that is not too shabby as far as remakes go. “The Magnificent Seven” has been remade, (film and TV), no less than five times, and in this version, the town of Rose Creek is under siege by mining industrialist, (and psychotic), Bartholomew Bogue, (Peter Sarsgaard). He tries to buy the town from the farmers for a pittance of what the land is worth. Bogue even kills a stray few people, just to prove his point, including Emma Cullen's, (Haley Bennett), husband, who dares to speak up. Yeah, this guy's insane, all right.

Emma and her friend, Teddy, (Luke Grimes), go to a nearby town and hire bounty hunter Sam Chisolm, (Denzel Washington), to help their town. Sam then recruits gambler and jokester, Josh Faraday, (Chris Pratt), legendary gentleman shootist Goodnight Robicheaux, (Ethan Hawke), his partner, a deadly Korean knife expert called Billy Rocks, (Byung-hun Lee), tracker Jack Horne, (Vincent D'onofrio), Mexican outlaw Vasquez, (Manuel Garcia-Rulfo), and finally a young Comanche warrior named Red Harvest, (Martin Sensmeier).

Arriving in Rose Creek, the seven wipe out Bogue's 22 henchmen, but that only means that Bogue will bring more in a week. Naturally, the seven will have to train the townspeople to defend themselves. We learn more about the seven, including that Robicheaux has lost his nerve to fight and leaves the group just as Bogue and his huge collection of bad guys are about to descend on the town.

The grand finale has all the townspeople using dynamite, guns, ropes, shovels, anything they have, to stop the hoard of rampaging horsemen into town. It's a cornucopia of carnage as bodies get blown away and start to pile up on the streets. Bullets fly, arrows whizz by, and a Gatling gun is brought in to give the townspeople a final coup de grâs. Each of our heroes give it their best shot to shoot as many bad guys before they themselves get turned into Swiss cheese, except for three of them, who manage to survive this Western apocalypse.

Directed by Antoine Fuqua with great flair and a keen eye; the suspense and flavor of the old Western theme is everywhere and feels great. With an over-written screenplay by Nick Pizzolatto and Richard Wenk, this long film could have

been tweaked with better exposition, but the basic structure does pay homage to the original movie. The real excitement lies in the actual battles, which are just as nail-biting as the ones from “Braveheart” or “Silverado.” There's also a beautiful score by the late James Horner and Simon Franglen that adds to the overall scope of the movie with some terrific cinematography by Mauro Fiore.

Washington and Pratt carry the film with their easy-going charm and dynamic presence. Pratt adds the comic relief and even goes psycho on occasion, showing a nice and unexpected twist to his character, while Washington, (like Yul Brynner in the original), is the glue that holds the picture together with his quiet, yet powerful authority. Look for beautiful and spunky Bennett in her understated role, and the team of Hawke and Lee, who have nice chemistry as best friends. As far as remakes go, it's far better than the recent slew that we've been getting.

I give “The Magnificent Seven” four bags of popcorn out of five.

“Snowden”

Okay, raise your hands if you've put a piece of black tape over your laptop's camera. Worried about being spied on against your will, huh? Meet Edward Snowden, (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), who's currently hold-up in a Tokyo hotel room with three reporters from the Guardian newspaper.

You see, Ed is a refugee from the U.S. and a whistle-blower that knows waaaaaay too much about the NSA and the CIA. Videotaping this all-important interview is documentary filmmaker Laura Poitras, (Melissa Leo), and journalist Glenn Greenwald, (Zachary Quinto); later joined by reporter, Ewen MacAskill, (Tom Wilkinson). Edward tells his story, (all true, by the way), about his days in the Army and then his subsequent move to computer research. It also helps the Edward is a computer genius whiz-kid at 25-years-old.

Impressed with his dazzling work at the CIA, Edward's boss, Corbin O'Brian, (Rhys Ifans), and his mentor Hank Forrester, (Nicholas Cage), bump him to more serious computer surveillance stuff in Switzerland, much to the consternation of Edward's girlfriend, Lindsay Mills, (Shailene Woodley). While there, Edward is introduced to fun-loving Gabriel Sol,

(Ben Schnetzer), who shows him the mother of all surveillance programs, XKeyscore, where you can look up anyone, anywhere, anytime, even on their laptop camera. Uh-oh!

Being CIA and NSA, Edward can't tell anyone about this, especially Lindsay, but soon he gets transferred to Hong Kong where he finds even more potentially illegal U.S. tapping goings on. But, as his bosses keep telling him, it's for the good of the country to find the terrorists, so I's okay to invade every single person's phone call, e-mail, Facebook page, SMS, text, etc. just to be sure. Edward, being a true-blue American, tries his very best to agree to all this, but the stress is too much and gives him occasional epileptic seizures.

After finding out that Lindsay was a victim of investigation, Edward decides enough is enough and the whole world should know about what is really is going on. Stealing secret government files and taking off for Tokyo, Edward spills the beans, making him a wanted fugitive in the U.S. forever. He later takes off for Ecuador, but can only get as far as Russia when his passport is revoked. The last five minutes of the movie features the real Edward Snowden.

Director Oliver Stone and Kieran Fitzgerald adapted the

screenplay into a ping-pongy flash-back story that really highlights the talents of Gordon-Levitt, who alters his voice to match the real-life Snowden. Gordon-Levitt covets such a range of emotion here, that carrying the movie for him is a joy to watch. Woodley, (from Thousand Oaks), is adorable and believable, and look for Nick Cage in a small, but fun role.

The script is full of those oh-so Oliver Stone political in-your-face moments, with his weird jump-cut edits with over-exposed film, color-saturated quick-cuts, and black and white images. But, forget all that and go to have your eyes opened and remember that total strangers could be checking up on anything you keep hidden away.

Got that tape ready now?

I give “Snowden” three bags of popcorn out of five.



Theatre Review

by Charles Foster Carmichael

“Assassins”

Winner of five Tony Awards, including 2004s Best Revival of a Musical, Steven Sondheim's darkly humorous musical isn't for everyone, but it is worth it. In “Assassins,” Sondheim and his collaborator, book writer John Weidman, say the unthinkable, though it's done in a deceptively uptempo musical-comedy tone, without exactly asking that the audience to sympathize with some of the nation's most notorious, (and would-be), presidential assassins. This extraordinary Sondheim work sees his most cynical view of history and humanity, that takes mixing and matching historical periods and characters with a short running time of only about 90 minutes.

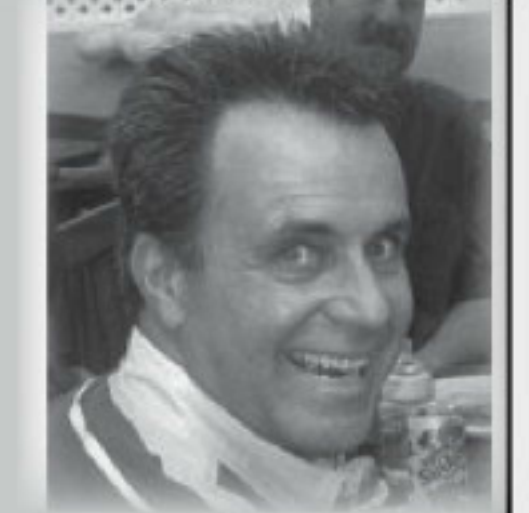
Told in a series of vignettes, Will Shupe plays the eerily soulless MC/Proprietor who talks the rogues' gallery of assassins into becoming presidential murderers. Chris Kerrigan leads the group as John Wilkes Booth and later ingratiates himself into the others' lives. Also in this unholy alliance is flamboyant Garfield assassin Charles Guiteau, played with exuberance by Vincent Perez, obsessed-with-actress Jodie Foster John Hinckley, creepily played by Kevin Ellis, disturbed McKinley assassin Leon Czolgosz, played by Ryan Peterson, the Italian would-be killer of Franklin Roosevelt, Giuseppe Zangara, played by Auro Tosi, and Santa Claus costumed Samuel Byck, played with delightful profane relish by Michael German.

For comic relief there is Kathleen

Sullivan as the ditzy and trigger-happy Sara Jane Moore who teams

up with Jackie Bianchi who plays Charles Manson follower, Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme, to kill President Gerald Ford. Levi Gotsman starts off as the occasional Narrator/Balladeer, but then changes into a convincing Lee Harvey Oswald.

Fred Helsel directed with Becky Castells handling the lively choreography and Gary Poirot leading the live orchestra just off stage. The cast is overall excellent in singing and acting, but stand-outs go to Chris Kerrigan as Booth, with his underlying subliminal comedy mixed into his raw performance, and Perez and German who both give stellar over-the-top showings. Kudos also go to ensemble member Genevieve Levin, who portrays anarchist Emma Goldman in a brief, but memorable scene. Be aware this musical contains adult language and content.



Tumbleweeds, continued from page 1

answer if different for everyone, but one thing that most enthusiasts of this era agree on is that they like larger than life characters that lived at this time. Of course, every era has its own heroes, villains and interesting people, but few American time periods match the colorful characters of the Wild West. From Billy the Kid, to Annie Oakley, and Nat Love, the list of characters and tales from this time is as extensive as it is impressive.

The cast of characters that are going to be portrayed at the Tumbleweed event is just one of the most fascinating selling points for the event. Some of

the historical people that are going to be portrayed include: Billy the Kid, Annie Oakley, Wild Bill Hickok, and may others. Additionally, there will be 150-200 costumed volunteers / people working the event — all of whom will be individuals who love history and who are willing to share information they know about the time period with guests of the event.

Prices for the event are \$15 for at the gate purchase, and \$12 for presale purchases. Children under 12 are free. To learn more, please visit www.tumbleweed.nottinghamfestival.com.

What You Need To Know

“Assassins”

Running through Oct. 16

Simi Valley

Cultural Arts Center

3050 Los Angeles Avenue

in Simi Valley

805.583.7900

Tickets: www.simi-arts.org