

A vampire movie with bite

LIGHTSCAMERAREACTION

STEPHEN BROWN Staff Writer

INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE
★★★½ (out of four stars)

Lestat and Louis, the vampires immortalized in Anne Rice's "Vampire Chronicles," are holding a blood drive, and you are invited.

You won't need a crucifix. Or garlic. Or even a stake. Just bring your desire for thrills and excitement. You're about to experience the ultimate revisionist vampire tale.

"Interview with the Vampire" is a stylish thriller combining a fascinating cast of characters with glamorous visuals and a twisted brand of dark humor. It is a cunning mixture of theatrical gusto and cinematic horror. Neil Jordan, director of "The Crying Game" and "A Company of Wolves," orchestrates this complex story by fueling the actors with a panache for their whimsical characters.

Tom Cruise ("Born on the Fourth of July" and "Rain Man") injects his character Lestat with a witty edge in his observations about the world and through a diabolical penchant for getting what he wants at the expense of others. Cruise, with long blonde hair, is often seen in tight close-ups and conveys volumes with his eyes alone. Cruise draws upon a charm that allowed his "Top Gun" character to convince his flight instructor to lose her loving feeling. This time around he portrays a character who seduces and destroys his prey, taking more than just their soul from them. As he kills indiscriminately, Cruise's Lestat is completely in command of his world. There is certainly some similarity between the cocky hot shot Cruise has played so often and the coy prince of darkness he creates in Lestat.

Brad Pitt ("Thelma and Louise" and "Kaliifornia") plays Louis, who narrates the story about his courtship by dark forces and his life as a vampire. Pitt demonstrates his range as an actor as he explores the dark side of human nature. "Forgive me if I have a lingering respect for life," Louis tells Lestat. The viewer can relate to Pitt's reading of the character because Louis is as attracted and repelled by the vampire lifestyle as the viewer will come to be.

A standout performance by newcomer Kirsten Dunst as the little girl Claudia takes focus away from both the male leads. Her appearance as a living doll, clad in bows and elegant dresses, is a sharp contrast to her actions as a fierce bloodsucking killer. Dunst conveys Claudia's innocence as well as her disarming manipulation tactics. Claudia's rage is a focal point for the story's conflict.

The story, as Louis tells the interviewer (Christian Slater of "True Romance"), begins in 18th century New Orleans. Louis, a plantation owner devastated by the death of his wife during childbirth, longs for death. And he invites it. He wants a release from the pain of the living.

That release comes in the form of Lestat who arrives to offer him a chance to live forever. When Lestat plunges his fangs into Louis' neck, the grieving man says his goodbye to the light and begins life as a vampire along side Lestat.

The two immortals form a loving bond as they infil-

trate the parties of high society in search of fresh blood. Louis is wary of killing humans and often prefers to draw blood from small animals. Lestat has a higher calling, however, to feast upon upper class ladies and gentlemen of the aristocracy, filling crystal wine glasses with the blood from their freshly gnawed veins.

The vampire population increases by one when Louis bites the lonely waif Claudia, and Lestat transforms her into a bloodsucker as well. A little girl who will remain forever young, Claudia comes between the two men and prompts the action that leads the characters on a 200-year adventure across Europe, in Paris and America.

The strange family central to the story (an odd variation on the "My Two Dads" theme) is a clever device through which to glimpse the inner workings of the vampire saga. Claudia sleeps in a coffin with Louis and spends her days painting and practicing piano as Lestat's own little prodigy. As she researches "her kind," she begins to come to terms with her mission in the world. She finds ways to place a rift between the two men in her life so she can get rid of Lestat and live peacefully with Louis. It is forbidden for one vampire to harm another, so Claudia will learn the consequences of her actions.

When the central characters stumble across a Paris theater troupe comprised solely of vampires, their unnatural bond is put to a grueling test. Armand (Antonio Banderas of "Philadelphia" and "Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!"), the oldest living vampire, and Santiago (Stephen Rea of "The Crying Game"), a mysterious vampire actor, take a liking to Louis. Armand admires Louis' way of connecting with the world of mortals.

As the central characters come to terms with how they have behaved within the vampire community, they realize they will have to pay for their actions. Their discoveries in Paris lead to a stunning showdown.

Brimming with sexual undertones, "Interview" dangles perilously on the edge of your expectations. Deep kisses, love crimes and daddy's little girl all have their place in the spellbinding decadence.

Cruise's Lestat provides a good deal of dark humor as he savors the act of murder and attempts to keep his new family together. As he wildly dances with a diseased corpse, he exclaims, "There's still life in the lady yet!" Later he scolds Claudia for killing in the house. And he observes of his companions, "We're one happy family." As the maestro of the macabre proceedings, Cruise seems to enjoy the acting stretch.

In addition, the music composed by George Fenton ("Dangerous Liaisons") and the cinematography by Philippe Rosselot ("A River Runs Through It") work in tandem to produce a terror-filled spectacle which flows like a well-choreographed theatrical production.

"Interview with the Vampire" combines strong visual and emotional elements to give the viewer a good time. It is technically exceptional and well-paced; despite its dark elements, it is still a beautiful film to behold.

So extend your wrist. And tilt your neck to the side. A new vampire's in town, and he's taking names. Just maybe you will be next to experience "Interview with the Vampire."

Question the album

SOUNDADVICE

GREGORY PEREZ Staff Writer

QUESTION THE ANSWERS The Mighty Mighty Bosstones
★★½ (out of four stars)

It takes a little while to get used to "Question the Answers." The fourth record from The Mighty Mighty Bosstones is a more danceable but less accessible release than their last major-label album, "Don't Know How To Party."

Ska purists have already disowned the Bosstones since they jumped on to Mercury Records in 1992. But for the rest of us unwashed masses, they've still got a good arsenal of bile-spewing sound and fury that just needs a little less production and a little more drunken wackiness.

"Question the Answers" is a jumble of ska-flavored tunes, calling back to when the octet was bad in plaid. After all, the Bosstones helped kick off the new wave of ska-core in America with their Taang! album "Devil's Night Out" in 1985. Since then, gaggles of bands meshing punk, metal and ska started popping up, trying to isolate that raw, speedy breed of ska-core that the Bosstones blare best.

The new record is a throwback to their second album, "More Noise and Other Disturbances." There's a much better helping of mid-tempo off-beat ska grooves and horn-driven melodies than last time around, as on "Pictures to Prove It" and "Stand Off." There's even a sweet, twinkly piano ditty called "Toxic Toast" that sets a mellow party mood that's new to their mostly abrasive repertoire.

It'd be a fine record if you'd never heard any other Bosstones records before. But what sets this one apart is all attitude.



BAD IN PLAID: The Mighty Mighty Bosstones

There's more political correctness here than Fugazi could shake a stick at. About the only light-hearted song is a re-release (for now the fourth time) of "Drunks and Children" from "Devil's Night Out," renamed "Dogs and Chaplains."

What made the Bosstones so mighty mighty in the past was their edge, their ability to write about absolutely nothing and make it convincing. Some of their best stuff was all about dancing with the devil, wearing lots of plaid and doing a lot of drinking. Even their last gun control song "Guns and the Young" was more convincing than "Hell of a Hat."

The Bosstones are taking things a little too seriously. Even the album's title sounds a little pretentious.

"Question the Answers."

Ooooh. Shivers.

The Peppers dig up their closet classics

SOUNDADVICE

BEN PILLOW Staff Writer

OUT IN L.A. Red Hot Chili Peppers
★★★ (out of four stars)

Full of early demo tracks, live performances and previously unreleased material, the Red Hot Chili Peppers expose their roots in their latest compilation, "Out in L.A."

The album is named after the group's first song, which came about after "we started spewing out some funky jam straight from our hearts," according to Flea. It is a record that follows the Chili Peppers through their maturation into one of today's most unique bands, despite the fact that bassist Flea and vocalist Anthony Keidis seem to be the only mainstays in the band.

Much of the album showcases the Chili Peppers' jazz and blues influences, intertwined with their own version of funk and Keidis' standard sexual references. The only real weak aspect of the album is that some of the songs, especially the raw, earlier tracks, tend to sound the same.

With 19 songs filling a running time just an hour long, the album starts with a remix of Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground" that the Chili Peppers covered on their 1989 release "Mother's Milk."

"Hollywood (Africa)" follows, featuring Keidis' wide vocal range and accentuated by the incorporation of a trumpet and saxophone. It is an extended dance mix of the original version that appeared on the Chili Peppers' 1985 album "Freaky Styley."

"If You Want Me To Stay" continues the trend of songs with few vocals. Instead, Keidis throws out random phrases that are often repeated over and over: "Behind the Sun" is another remix, this time spinning off the Chili Peppers' 1987 album, "The Uplift Mofa Party Plan," that slows the album down with a relaxed attitude and more focus on rhythm.

The Chili Peppers' live cover of Jimi Hendrix's classic "Castles Made of Sand" is next with Keidis husking up his voice to do a pretty good job imitating Hendrix. Two more live performances follow, "Special Secret Song Inside" and "F.U." that provide god examples of the energy the Chili Peppers create onstage.

The previously unreleased "Get Up and Jump" follow, a demo version taken off of the 1982 album "The Red Hot Chili Peppers," and back when the band was known as Tony Flow and the Miraculously Majestic Masters of Mayhem. The title track "Out

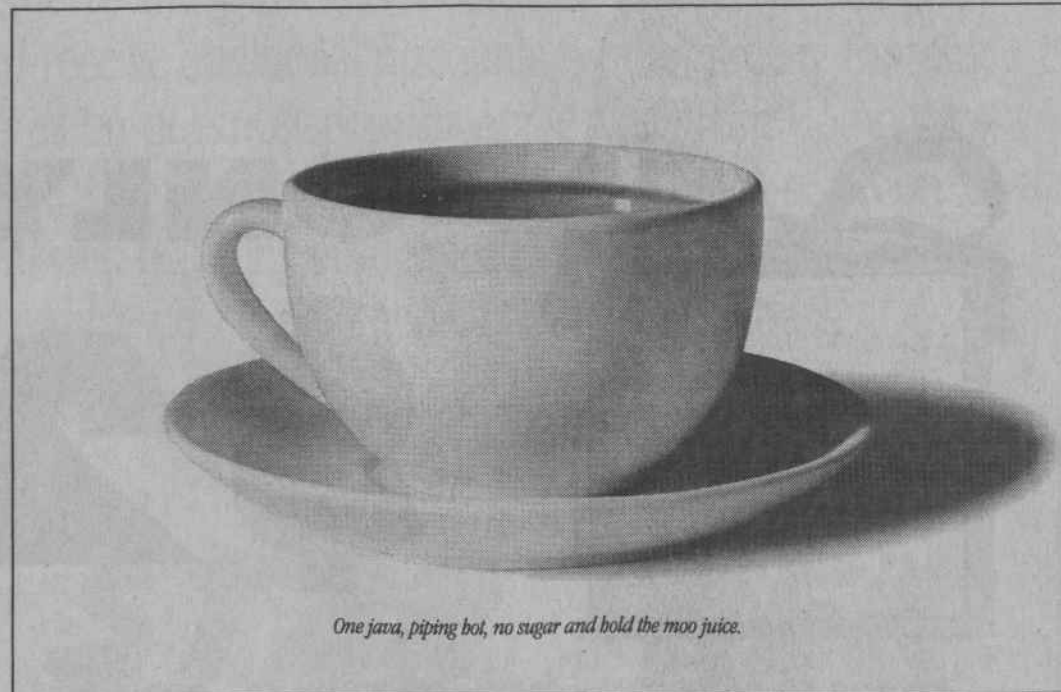
in L.A." is next, followed by "Green Heaven," a political song in which Keidis' talks about the wrongs of government and society by focusing on issues like racism, deceit and class discrimination.

"Police Helicopter" contrasts the serious lyrics with Keidis' creative but almost comic words ("Police helicopter shot from the sky/Police helicopter lands in my eye."). It is followed by "Nevermind" and "Sex Rap," two songs hurt by their similarity to one another.

"Blues for Meister" slows the record down from the fast, upbeat songs to focus more on the Chili Peppers' blues side. It is followed by 13 seconds of unintelligible lyrics in "You Always Sing the Same," and 23 seconds of funny lyrics in "Stranded" (Stranded on a toilet bowl ... to prove you're a man you must wipe it with your hand.).

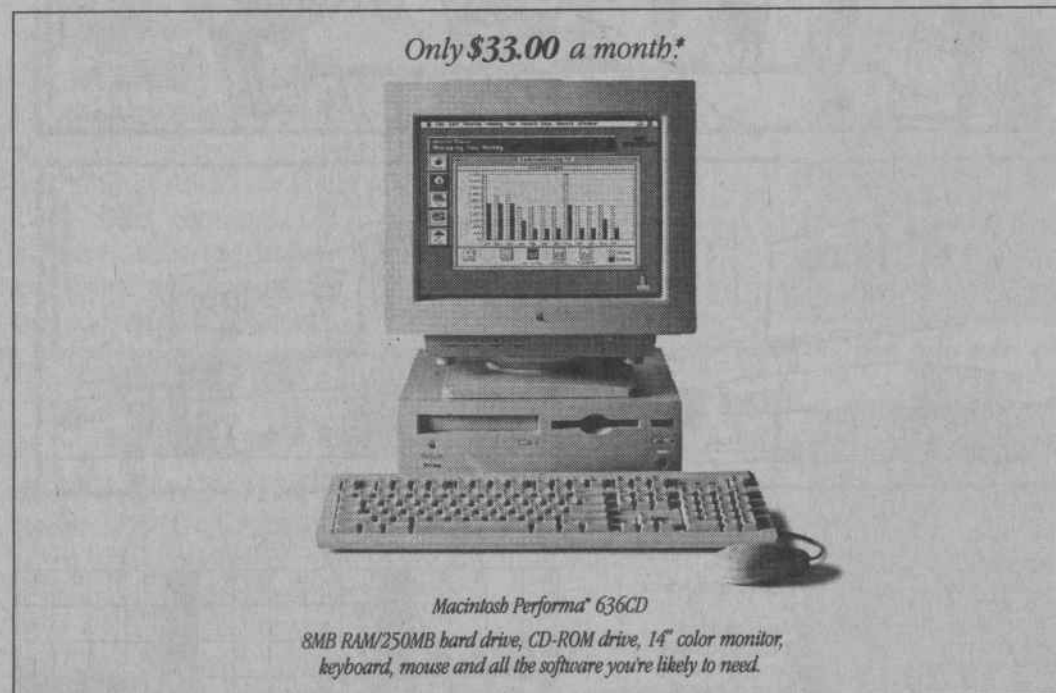
"Flea Fly" and "What It Is" follow with simple sounds, the former minus any instruments and the latter made up of only Keidis' voice and Flea's bass. The album closes with a hilarious rendition of the Christmas classic "Deck the Halls," giving the record a comic ending, but then again, who ever really associates seriousness with the Red Hot Chili Peppers?

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