

# Independent films 'Shine' bright above the 'Stars'

## LIGHTS! CAMERA! REACTION!

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SHINE  
★★★★ (out of four stars)

When the Academy announces its winners for the most prestigious awards in cinema next month, the current highest-grossing film of all time will not be called after the words, "And the Oscar goes to..."

Twenty years ago, *Star Wars* may have been a Best Picture nominee, but even the all-powerful Force was not strong enough to sway votes from one of Woody Allen's best creations (and Best Picture of 1977), *Annie Hall*. In fact, the huge blockbuster films racking up the megabucks like your *Independence Days* and your run-of-the-mill natural disaster flicks do not fare well in the eyes of the Academy (except for perhaps Best Visual Effects or something).

Just look at the films of Steven Spielberg before he made his masterpiece *Schindler's List*. Recently, the independent film has stolen the spotlight from the multi-budgeted, and recycled, studio films pumped out each year. This year in particular is bound to be yet another good year for the "indie" flick at the Academy Awards. Four of the five nominees for Best Picture are "indies."

One of these is Scott Hicks' film *Shine*, the real-life story of piano great David Helfgott and his emotional descent caused by music.

The film opens on a dark, rainy night in Perth, Australia, where we are introduced to David Helfgott (portrayed stunningly by the award-winning Australian stage actor Geoffrey Rush), a fast-talking, mentally unstable man who comments he "must stop talking, it's a problem" to the patrons of the piano bar he has just stumbled into.

During the ride to David's abode, which the patrons graciously offer, the first of a series of flashbacks occur, unfolding the events leading up to the mental state in which David now wanders.

The first flashback takes David to a local talent show he competed in at around the age of eight (acted by Alex Rafalowicz,

where he astonishes one of the judges and piano teacher Ben Rosen (Nicholas Bell) with his performance of Chopin's "The Polonaise."

After the talent show, in which David does not place, his father and piano instructor, Peter (Armin Mueller-Stahl), gives his son the usual talk of "how lucky a boy" he is to have music in his life and from now on David must "always win."

Following this, Ben Rosen tracks down the young prodigy and offers to continue David's lessons free of charge. However, he does not fulfill his father's request to teach David Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 (the Rach. 3 for short).

Not only is this the hardest piano piece to play, filled with more notes per second than any other concerto, but performing it requires a passion equal to acting Shakespeare. Mr. Rosen says the young boy lacks this passion.

After a quick jump back to the present David sleeping on the floor alone in his room, there is another flashback to David as an awkward teenager who appears to be most comfortable on the bench behind a grand piano.

Ben Rosen has molded the young pianist into the state champion, where David is given an offer to study music in the United States. However, David's stern father will not allow this event to "destroy his family." David finds solace in an elderly woman, well-to-do socialite Katherine Prichard, whom he chats with and performs for on her old upright piano.

Katherine advises David to follow his dream and to go to the Royal College of Music, where he has received a full scholarship. David leaves his house to go to the college, ignoring his father's promise he will never be allowed back into the family.

While studying at the Royal College, David takes on the emotional strain of learning the ins and outs of the infamous Rach. 3. Upon performing this difficult piece, David is both physically and emotionally strained and experiences a mental breakdown. The next years of David's life are spent in and out of mental institutions away from his "one true friend," music.

As the film surges forward in David's life, it is music he once again discovers to help him climb out of his emotional pit. It is this movement forward in the film, and in his life, which helps to demonstrate the strength of the bonds of love and the power of the human spirit.

Geoffrey Rush's depiction of David Helfgott earned him a nomination for Best Actor, and Armin Mueller-Stahl's performance of the stern, yet loving father, was given a nomination for Best Supporting Actor. The entire film is edited beautifully, especially the transitions for David's flashbacks.

The man responsible for this editing, Pip Karmel, is also up for an Oscar in the Best Editing category. The music of the film is definitely a unifying force and speaks with its own voice in conveying the emotions of the characters and, (wouldn't you know it) this film will appear in the Best Original Score category at next month's Oscars.

All these talents are combined under the direction of Scott Hicks, who is up for Best Director. In a quote from the soundtrack of the film, Hicks writes, "Music and film share a common language, one that can dissolve international barriers and speak to all people."

They are more closely related to each other than perhaps any other two art forms, sharing the ability to stir powerful, irrational feelings: great longings and fears, great losses and triumphs. Cinema, like music, is not primarily a medium of the intellect, it is about the emotions and agitation of the mind."

*Shine* is an emotional tour de force of cinema, and its marriage to music in the film helps emphasize these feelings.

So this weekend, when you are deciding whether or not to see *Star Wars* for the fourth time, you can leap to the front of the line with a ticket for *Shine* or another independent film (perhaps *Secrets & Lies*, *The English Patient* or the renting of *Fargo*—the three other "indies" up for Best Picture), clutched in your hand and experience a film that touches your heart, not your wallet.

# Blast from the Past

JOHN LYONS Features Editor

So, the other day I was driving down the road, flipping the channels in my car radio, when on WUSC-FM 90.5, I heard the crackle of an old record.

I continued to listen and found the radio program was something called the Blast from the Past, which airs Wednesdays from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. and has apparently been a staple at the college station for years.

I listened for a while and was surprised to find the Beatles, Rolling Stones and Beach Boys weren't the only bands to record music in the 1960s.

After the show, I was so excited I decided to ask the shows host, Dr. Jimmy Fever, a few questions.

Evidently, the idea behind the show is to highlight those artists who aren't typically played on other oldie stations.

"The commercial oldies stations generally play top 10 or top 20 hits from the late 50s and early 60s," he said. "We do a little of that, but we try to concentrate on things you don't hear or can't hear other places."

Some of the styles of music Dr. Jimmy focuses on include instrumental music, surf guitar music, doo-wop music and a capella. In addition, he said the Blast from the Past highlights artists other oldies stations tend to glance over.

"I try to focus on the people who were one-hit wonders," he said. "The people who didn't make careers in the business. I try to stay away from artists like Elvis, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones because you can hear them elsewhere."

"And I like to feature artists whose work was covered by more famous artists," he continued. "People like Chuck Berry who really gave birth to the rock'n'roll sound in the mid to late 50s. It's that sound, Chuck Berry's sound, that made big impressions on band's like the Rolling Stones, the Beatles and even Pat Boone."

Well, all of this came as quite a surprise to me since all I had ever heard from the 50s and 60s were top 40 artists, so you can imagine my surprise when I was told that some of the artists were even considered as controversial for the times as many bands today.

"I think rock'n'roll has always been a performance kind of music," Dr. Jimmy said. "It's always been much better live than recorded. The difference today is that the performance has become more extreme; musically, theatrically and in terms of the personalities of the audience. And it is interesting to watch the evolution of that process from the early 50s when early rhythm and blues artists were pushing the envelope of acceptable behavior and acceptable

lyrics for that time. It continues in today's music, which is still pushing the envelope."

Dr. Jimmy Fever is a faculty member of the university, and he has been the host for the Blast from the Past for almost four years now. He said the show has been a regular feature on WUSC since a DJ called Free Wheeling Frank started it in the late 70s or early 80s.

Dr. Jimmy said the constancy of the Blast from the Past and other specialty shows has been an important thing for the station's cohesiveness.

"I think the continuity is important," he said. "There is a tradition behind specialty shows that can be passed down from one DJ to the next. And more than that, I think the ethos of the station, the whole atmosphere, is something that needs to build slowly and be kept carefully, because as we saw with the shutdown last year, that ethos can be destroyed very quickly."

"I think it's important for the station to be something important to the people who are there," Dr. Jimmy said. "I'm concerned with us being interesting to ourselves, to each other and to the Columbia community. I think it's important that we challenge our listeners and their musical tastes and that we give them the opportunity to hear things they can't hear anywhere else."

Dr. Jimmy said he strives to offer his listeners music from the 50s and 60s that they can't find on other stations. He said the show has grown in this respect since he took it over.

"At fist, I was drawn to the music I was most familiar with," he said. "And that was top 10 music when I was a teen. But playing that music three hours a week, I soon grew bored with it, and I wanted to hear those things I hadn't heard before and that most other people hadn't either."

"So now, my shows tend to feature more obscure artists and different styles of music that were not quite popular in the 50s and 60s but are still quite typical of that style of music."

Dr. Jimmy said that it is this effort to play obscure artists and different styles of music that defines WUSC. He said the station is defined by its effort to be something different.

"I'd call it something extremely different," Dr. Jimmy said. "That's what each of us strive for in our shows, and the specialty show is a continuation of the idea of playing something really good that other people have overlooked."

And according to Dr. Jimmy, this attitude has caught on in recent years.

"I think the audience has grown in the last three or four years," he said. "I think part of that is a desire to experience something new."

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DANGEROUS GROUND (R) 1:45 3:45 5:45 7:45 9:45	BEAUTICIAN AND THE BEAST PG 1:20 7:20
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