

'Folk Hero & Funny Guy' delivers melancholy performance

By Nick Schager

Whether the film's protagonists are on stage singing a song or telling a joke, the male ego commands the spotlight in "Folk Hero & Funny Guy," in which two childhood friends — one a successful folk rocker, the other an aspiring standup comic — hit the road together for an impromptu tour. While women are wooed and hijinks experienced along the route of this dive-bar odyssey, writer-director Jeff Grace's easygoing indie delivers a somewhat more melancholy performance than its droll exterior initially suggests. A bromance with a bitter streak born of personal delusions, fears and failings, it's got enough personality and pathos to make it a mildly appealing option amid the usual cacophonous summer fare.

After his latest comedy-club misfire, gawky Paul (Alex Karpovsky) meets up with longtime buddy Jason (Wyatt Russell), a heavily bearded folk-music star whose hippie vibe proves irresistible to women. As if on a whim, Jason asks Paul to open for him at his upcoming gigs, — fully supporting his friend's desire to ditch a lucrative advertising career to become the next Chris Rock, especially in the aftermath of a bitter break-up. Despite reservations, Paul agrees, only to find that they won't be travelling in a stylish tour bus to arenas, but instead will be road-tripping in Jason's Volvo hatchback from one low-rent venue to another.

The modest venues turn out to be a blessing for Paul, since he bombs at each stop, due to an outdated set low-lighted by a cringe-inducing bit about Evites. In those moments, contrasted by the adulation Jason receives from fans and romantically inclined groupies, "Folk Hero & Funny Guy" mines its central odd-couple dynamic for shaggy laughs.

The alternately funny and borderline-contentious rapport between the two friends is complicated by Bryn (Meredith Hagner), an amateur singer who, upon meeting the men, seems to be on the verge of hooking up with Paul, only to fall into the drunken arms of Jason. To make matters messier, she joins their tour as the opening act, leaving Paul sandwiched on stage between two competent musicians each night.

Reveals

As their journey progresses, Jason reveals the real motivation for this impromptu series of shows: He's intent on making it to Charleston, where he hopes to finally pledge his undying love for Becky (Melanie Lynskey), with whom he's previously had a number of fantastic (if fleeting) encounters. Given Jason's hard-partying outlook, as well as the blase arrogance of his belief that Becky will ditch her fiancé now that he's suddenly ready to settle down, the plan is clearly doomed. Nonetheless, "Folk Hero & Funny Guy" is hardly predicated on narrative surprise; rather, it's mostly interested in the off-kilter but natural

chemistry of its leads, who despite their differences come across as comrades who genuinely care about each other, and whose bond is solidified by their shared hangups.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: The Middle East Festival landscape is set to be shaken up by the El Gouna Film Festival, an ambitious new event combining financial muscle, expertise, and a competitive calendar slot.

Located in the high-end El Gouna Red Sea resort, the fest is backed by Egyptian telecom billionaire **Naguib Sawiris**. Well-respected Arab cinema expert and programmer **Intishal Al Tamimi** is on board as artistic director. Al Tamimi is a former Arab cinema programmer at the Abu Dhabi film fest, where he also ran the Sanad film fund.

The first edition of El Gouna is set to take place Sept 22-Sept 29, ahead of both the Cairo and Dubai film fests, which are the region's main film events. This means that, going forward, El Gouna is positioned to potentially get first dibs on Arab film premiers.

El Gouna, which is being equipped with state-of-the-art festival infrastructure, is touted as a safe haven.

The fest will comprise competitions for features, documentaries and shorts and also a market side called CineGouna Platform, a co-production mart. (RTRS)

Film

Variety



This image released by Warner Bros Pictures shows Annabelle Wallis in a scene from 'King Arthur: Legend of the Sword'. (AP)

Film

Beckham great on screen: Ritchie

'King Arthur' may appeal to 'GoT' crowd

By Lindsey Bahr

Deep into Guy Ritchie's "King Arthur: Legend of the Sword," a bad guy who we've never met before informs Arthur (Charlie Hunnam) and his mates that they'd better be at the castle before dark if they want to see "the boy" and "the girl" again. It's one of those harmless, up the stakes clichés that's all too common in action movies, but, in the flawed yet amusing "King Arthur," it unwittingly left me baffled. "Which girl?" I wondered, sincerely doubting that this was the intended effect.

At this point there are two options: The Mage (Astrid Berges-Frisbey), a strange animal-controlling magician who we recently saw with a knife at her throat, or Maggie (Annabelle Wallis) who over the course of the movie is so underdeveloped that at different points I'd thought she was Arthur's presumed to be dead mother (who is in fact played by the just similar enough-looking Poppy Delevingne) or the evil King Vortigern's (Jude Law) wife. (She's neither.) It's a strange thing for a movie that is this packed to the brim with dialogue and clever exposition to have managed to so insufficiently explain a supposed key player. The film is somehow both over-written and underwritten.

It's a stretch to even deem it a King Arthur movie (marketing calls it an "iconoclastic take on the classic Excalibur myth," while a producer says it's "not your father's King Arthur.")

And yet, "King Arthur: Legend of the Sword," is reasonably entertaining with its CGI-laden summer nonsense, stuffed with mystical beasts (including giant elephant-like creatures with wrecking ball tails), vulgar action and delicious scenery chewing from Law. It skates by on Ritchie's divisively kinetic filmmaking and the charisma of Hunnam's reluctant hero.

This Arthur was raised in a brothel after seeing his mother and father, King Uther (Eric Bana) killed in a coup. A speed-induced montage later and Arthur is a fully grown and martial arts trained man who is a street-wise protector of the brothel's prostitutes. His Uncle Vortigern, who sold his soul to get the crown, rules Camelot. But Vortigern can't access his full powers without the Excalibur sword, which, as you

know, is stuck in a rock. This leads Vortigern's soldiers to round up every man of Arthur's age to find the remaining heir.

Hunnam's Arthur is a wise-cracking, sensitive, who neither seeks nor wants power of any kind. What he does want is never really explored beyond the fact that he cares about his friends and feels some sort of obligation to protect the weak. But he eventually gets on board with his birthright — partly to avenge his father's death and partly because a group of outlaws, including The Mage, Bedivere (Djimon Hounsou) and Bill (Aidan Gillen), sort of make him do it. An Arthur for the millennial generation perhaps?

Designed

Indeed, Ritchie's "King Arthur" seems specifically designed to appeal to the "Game of Thrones" crowd (though mercifully with some hope infused into the core of the story) and definitely not to anyone who has any deep reverence for the classic tale. If that's a compromise you're willing to make, there are some genuinely compelling and innovative sequences of the action and dialogue variety (and a jarring David Beckham cameo). The film falls apart in the final showdown, however, when Ritchie gives himself over to the CGI leaders to craft a mind-numbing duel that looks so much like a video game, it would be easy to forget you're still watching "King Arthur."

Despite a shameless non-ending that hints at sequel possibilities, this is not a film that is likely to stick with you even past the movie theater parking lot. Like Arthur, you'll be happy that you got alive and relatively unscathed.

"King Arthur: Legend of the Sword," a Warner Bros. release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "sequences of violence and action, some suggestive content and brief strong language. Running time: 126 minutes. Two stars out of four.

Also:

LONDON: David Beckham has received some scathing reviews in the British press for his cameo in the film "King Arthur: Legend of the Sword," but director Guy Ritchie has given the former soccer star the thumbs up

for his performance.

"I love him and I think he's great on screen. I find him very talented," Ritchie told Reuters at the film's European premiere, when asked if Beckham had the potential to be as good at acting as at soccer.

Ritchie's take on the medieval legend follows King Arthur, played by **Charlie Hunnam**, who is robbed of his birthright and has a tough upbringing. But once he pulls the Excalibur sword from the stone, he is forced to acknowledge his true legacy.

Beckham, the former Manchester United and Real Madrid midfielder known for his bending kicks, plays the soldier Trigger in the sword-pulling scene.

Beckham "shows just about enough dramatic range to have played the stone the sword got stuck in," The Telegraph said in its review, adding that he had "sabotaged" the scene.

"It's a misguided, fist-biter of a performance," Empire said.

Beckham, who also had a cameo in Ritchie's previous movie, "The Man From U.N.C.L.E.," said it was "nice to be involved" in the film.

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LOS ANGELES: In only the second weekend of the summer box office, the first ice-cold front approaches.

"Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2" looks to continue its reign over the box office this weekend, but it's far from the most interesting story. That title goes to "King Arthur: Legend of the Sword," which is anticipating an opening weekend flop of epic proportions for Warner Bros. and Village Roadshow. Off of a \$175 million production budget, not taking into account marketing costs, **Guy Ritchie's** take on the medieval legend should make \$25 million from over 3,600 locations.

Ritchie has seen box office glory in the past with 2009's "Sherlock Holmes" (\$209 million domestic and \$524 million worldwide) and its 2011 sequel, "A Game of Shadows" (\$187 million, \$545 million). But more recently, the director saw a similar fate with his 2015 outing for Warner Bros., "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." The film ended its run with nearly \$110 million worldwide off a \$75 million budget, despite receiving generally positive reviews from critics. (Agencies)

LOS ANGELES: CBS Films has set a Feb. 23 release date for **Helen Mirren's** haunted house drama "Winchester."

Mirren stars as firearms heiress **Sarah Winchester** along with **Jason Clarke**, **Sarah Snook**, and **Angus Sampson**. Siblings **Michael Spierig** and **Peter Spierig** are directing from their own script. Producers are **Tim McGahan** and **Brett Tomberlin**.

Winchester was convinced that she was haunted by the souls killed at the hands of the Winchester Repeating Rifle. After the sudden deaths of her husband and child, she threw herself into the 24-hours a day, seven days a week construction of an enormous mansion designed to keep the evil spirits at bay.

Clarke plays a skeptical **San Francisco** psychiatrist dispatched to the estate to evaluate her state of mind, who discovers that her obsession may not be so insane after all. (RTRS)

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LOS ANGELES: Well Go USA Entertainment has bought all North American rights for Chris Peckover's Christmas-themed horror-thriller "Better Watch Out," starring **Olivia DeJonge**.

"Better Watch Out," formerly known as "Safe Neighborhood," stars DeJonge as a babysitter who, one snowy night on a quiet suburban street, must defend her twelve-year-old charge (**Levi Miller**) from intruders but quickly learns that this is an extraordinary home invasion that demands an equally extraordinary response. Co-stars are **Virginia Madsen**, **Patrick Warburton**, **Ed Oxenbould**, **Aleks Mikic** and **Dacre Montgomery** ("Power Rangers"). Oxenbould and DeJonge starred in **M. Night Shyamalan's** 2015 horror-thriller "The Visit." She also stars in TNT's "Will."

The film will receive a theatrical and digital release on Oct 6, with a home video release to follow in time for the holiday season. (RTRS)

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LOS ANGELES: **Liam Hemsworth** and **Adam Devine** are set to star opposite **Rebel Wilson** in the New Line comedy

"Isn't It Romantic."

Todd Strauss-Schulson is directing the movie.

The film follows a cynical woman, played by Wilson, who discovers that her life has become a romantic comedy. The two actors are involved in a love triangle with Wilson, with Devine playing a character who is stuck in the friend zone and Hemsworth as the



Mirren



Hemsworth

object of Wilson's affections.

Erin Cardillo wrote the first draft of the script. **Dana Fox**, **Katie Silberman**, and **Paula Pell** worked on the screenplay as well, with the most recent revisions by **Sam Pitman** and **Adam Cole-Kelly**.

Todd Garner, **Grant Scharbo**, **Gina Matthews**, and **Jeremy Stein** are producing the comedy. Produc-

tion is set to start in June. (RTRS)

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BELGRADE: A Serbian activist on Wednesday threw a pie in the face of French intellectual **Bernard-Henri Levy** at a showing of his film "Peshmerga" in Belgrade.

The film about the Kurds' battle against the Islamic State group was being shown at the Beldocs

documentary festival in the city when Levy was ambushed by a member of the small communist group SKOJ, the state-run Tanjug news agency reported.

As Levy addressed the audience, the young man ran in front of him and threw the pie in his face. Two others, claiming to be members of the SKOJ, shouted: "Murderer, leave Belgrade!" (AFP)