

Christy's Grandiose top 10 of EVERYTHING

by Christy Gordon

Thanks for noticing the lack of Top Ten list last week. I think my favorite stories were throwing the paper down in frustration and using the *Chimes* as kindling.

To be fair (to myself), I did still write a couple pieces.

But I digress.

This is a Very Special Top Ten List, akin to an episode of "Full House" featuring alcohol abuse or "Jessie's Song," the riveting "Saved by the Bell" in which Jessie finds herself addicted to caffeine pills.

Actually, it's barely like that in any way, but it is Christmas focused, and it does feature multiple references to a song featured on the best holiday-themed album ever recorded by a boy band, and how can that be wrong?

1. "A Charlie Brown Christmas" and "It's Christmas Again, Charlie Brown." Maybe it's nostalgia. Maybe it's my affinity toward Beethoven-loving, child prodigy Schroeder. Or maybe it's Sally mistaking "hark" for "hockey stick."

Whatever it is, Peanuts Christmas specials are enchanting every time — and you and I both know we choke

up during Linus' speech on the true meaning of Christmas.

Spectacular.

2. "It's a Wonderful Life." If this isn't a Christmas classic, then nothing is. Frank Capra's tale of what the world would look like without one small town guy (the wonderful Jimmy Stewart) is a yearly watch for me, and it's with very good reason.

If you haven't seen this one, I suggest you do so, perhaps with your family. You'll only feel better.

3. *NSYNC's "Home for Christmas." Mock me if you so desire. As I am, at this point, 100 percent rid of music snobbery, I have absolutely no shame in loving "Home for Christmas." Although it's cheesier than Bing Crosby and lacks the depth of John Lennon, JC, Justin, Lance, Chris and Joey's holiday offering is an entertaining one. Radio hit "Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays" is fun, the title track is more so (cue the gospel choir!) and "Oh Holy Night" a capella can't be beat.

(K. Kage, this one's for you.)

4. "Wakko's Wish." My two favorite cartoons provided

my two favorite (television series) Christmas specials, and the "Animaniacs" one is the more serious of the two. The Wakkos are orphans here who, in the end, just want to make the world a better place.

Peace on earth in animated form looks pretty good to me.

5. "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever." I read this Barbara Robinson bit of kid-lit in elementary school, and I've never gotten over its brilliance. The story of six naughty children and how they teach a town what Christmas is all about is told poignantly and humorously, and while it may be targeted at children, there's merit for all ages there.

6. "Home Alone" and "Home Alone 2: Lost in New York." If I'm hearing "Carol of the Bells," I'm thinking of this series. It's pretty rare for a sequel to be just as good as its predecessor, but here's a shining example of just that.

Gist, which you already know: Kevin (Macaulay Culkin) spends Christmas far away from his family completely by accident, inept crooks (Joe Pesci and Daniel Stern) go after him and wacky antics ensue. All that and Catherine O'Hara — it doesn't get much better than this.

7. "The Most Horrible X-Mas Ever." Cartoon special number two just might be the most disturbingly funny Christmas bit of entertainment ever. (Discount "Jingle All the Way.") Leave it to Invader Zim, everyone's favorite kind of stupid alien, and his trusty, completely insane robot Gir, to recognize Santa's supremacy and attempt to conquer the world from there.

Watch for the Easter Platypus and the best Christmas tune since "Home for Christmas," plus a number of quotable



FILE PHOTO

Sam (Thomas Sangster) and Joanna (Olivia Olson) share the most adorable moment possible in 'Love Actually.'

lines.

8. "The Muppet Christmas Carol." You know the Dickens drill, but what if Kermit was Bob Cratchit and those old hecklers in the balcony were somehow involved? Something great gets greater with these puppets at the helm.

9. "The Toy that Saved Christmas." "VeggieTales" is probably better than you remember, and they know how to do the holidays right. This bit about a toy that sees that there has to be something more to Christmas than commercialism is touching and involves penguins. There are few better combinations.

10. "Love Actually." This is my pick for the best romantic comedy ever made. Yes, ever. Pay no mind to "When Harry Met Sally ..." or "Kate & Leopold" or anything of the

sort; this tale of ten or so love stories intertwined, some sad, some happy and some a little bittersweet, is a glorious film. Really, it is.

Plus, it features the third greatest Christmas song of all time (after "Home for Christmas" and the "Invader Zim" one), "All I Want for Christmas is You." What's not to like here?

Clearly, there are a number of fine Christmas films, albums and television specials I haven't mentioned here. If this really gets your goat, bear in mind that this is a top ten list, and just because I didn't mention "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" or the Spice Girls' cover of "Santa Baby" doesn't mean they aren't Christmas classics in their own right.

Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good exam week.

'Songs for Christmas' a holly jolly collection to remember

Santa Sufjan Stevens' 5-disc triumph a welcome addition to anyone's holiday music catalog

BY BRANDON HAAN
Staff Writer

In the short time I've been here I've already found that there are few people more warmly embraced by the Calvin community than the almost saint-like Sufjan Stevens, a near angelic being with whom there seems to be an unhealthy obsession. However, he really does nothing to give us any reason not to like him.

For those of you who aren't followers of the Sufjan cult, I apologize, but this review will probably only deepen your frustration over the fact that he seems to always be everywhere and on everyone's tongue. But really, his latest contribution is something that I believe anyone can enjoy, even those trying hardest to resist.

I've been a Sufjan fan for a long time, before I found out about Calvin's addiction to him, and I've always respected him for his talents vocally and musically. Playing over 20 different instruments as a one man music machine with never ending inspiration and possessing a vocal range that never ceases to amaze, he has always been more than worthy of the praise given him, and that fact is only affirmed even more as time progresses.

And he has just added yet another masterpiece to his ever-growing discography, rivaling all his work thus far, yes, even "Illinoise." He recently compiled and released a mass of Christmas songs in a five disc boxed set complete

with Christmas stickers, short stories, lyrics with chord progressions for sing-alongs and a cartoon strip/poster. Overkill? I don't think so. All the extras thrown into the box set a tone for the project that makes it seem even more Christmas-like. When I really think about it, I come to the realization that we take comfort in Christmas because of all the things that surround us and make the holiday seem complete. This does not mean material possessions in the form of gifts, but rather, the things that help set that "special" mood for us to feel Christmas as "just right."

I know for me it's things like having my aunts from far away back at home, watching "It's a Wonderful Life" for the 3rd time in 24 hours, playing Uno or Sequence till 1 in the morning with family and having ping pong tournaments that turn into all-out war. In the act of throwing all those extras in the box Sufjan helps to remind us what we associate Christmas with, not all the stuff we get or throw all over our houses, but the strange little things that seem to draw the holiday together even more for us.

But he doesn't only work to remind us of the little things that bring Christmas

its warmth; he also works to remind us of the most important thing of all, the birth of God's son. When listening to his versions of traditional hymns such as "O Come, O Come Immanuel," "Amazing Grace," "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," "Once in

does them in such a way that no matter how many times I've heard them, they still have the ability to touch me in a new and profound way.

At the same time, there are the songs that have absolutely nothing to do with Christianity and are done in the same spectacular way. Some are traditional carols that Stevens remakes in a beautiful and breathtaking way, and others are slightly silly "Santa Sufjan" originals. Even in their fun and goofy way, the original pieces still end up being the kind of songs that send any listener into a nostalgia framed state of mind, transporting them back to that first taste of egg nog, their favorite present or the time they got to stand next

to the cutest girl or boy in the Sunday school Christmas program.

The set is in some ways an interesting chronicle of his career thus far. Recorded in 2001-2003 and 2005-2006, the difference in years shows the subtle changes that have taken place in Stevens' sound and view of music. The earlier CDs in the set have a slower and almost more thought-out feel. Yet as I went through the



FILE PHOTO

Royal David's City" and so on, I can't help but feel wonder, not only at his amazing talent in taking timeless songs and re-making them in an absolutely breathtaking way, but also at the child who would come to save me of my sin. Stevens has the special talent of taking these songs, stripping them down to their true beauty and then making them soft and pensive, all the while never causing them to lose their amazing power. He

Hollywood puts on its Christmas sweater

Filmgoers have their pick of movies to catch, both good and bad, this holiday season

BY CHRIS BEAUMONT
Staff Writer

For people who enjoy watching Hollywood movies, the Christmas season is like... well, Christmas. It is during this time that studios release a barrage of high profile movies both to contend for Academy Awards and to boost year-end revenues. These films range from the avant-garde to the utterly formulaic. Regardless of the quality of these films, none of you have an excuse to be bored for the rest of the year. Among the sizeable collection of good and not-so-good films of the holiday season, here are a few which I find noteworthy.

Casino Royale

It was inevitable that Daniel Craig would bring changes to the Bond franchise. However, the scope and the effectiveness of this modification far exceeded my expectations, making "Casino Royale" the freshest and most interesting Bond movie that I have ever seen.

Sure, "Royale" has its share

of Bondisms — irresistible women, glamorous locales and tightly choreographed action sequences abound here. However, what is unique about this newest film outweighs what is familiar about it. Overall, "Royale" is slower than its predecessors, favoring suspenseful dialogue over extended action.

The remaining action scenes are darker than what is typical for a Bond film. As one villain remarks, we are meant to "feel" Bond's kills. Director Martin Campbell (who introduced Pierce Brosnan as Bond to the world in "Goldeneye") accomplishes this through more handheld camera shots and, at times, black and white film.

Finally, Daniel Craig brings some much needed angst to his character. Craig acts out heartbreak, malice and regret to a level that is rare for such a commercial film. "Royale" is easily worth the admission ticket if you haven't already seen it.

A Good Year

If "Casino Royale" exemplifies how filmmakers can breathe new life into familiar Hollywood concepts, "A Good Year" shows how they can shamelessly milk them. The film is clearly a calculatedly safe move both on the part of director Ridley Scott (who is recovering from the commercially and critically unsuccessful "Kingdom of Heaven") and lead man Russell Crowe (who is recovering from throwing a phone at a hotel concierge last year).

The film's story is meant to comfort and appeal to as many people as possible. It follows British stock broker Max Skinner (Crowe) as he journeys to his deceased uncle's vineyard. The vineyard, which he inherits from his uncle, is where he spent his fondest childhood days. His



FILE PHOTO

Rachel Weisz and Hugh Jackman each portray a number of characters in 'The Fountain,' writer/director Darren Aronofsky's latest film. Here, they play Tom, a present-day medical researcher, and his cancer-afflicted wife Izzi.

journey leads him to the revelation that there is indeed more to life than money. Profound.

The scenery is admittedly beautiful and well shot, but the story is so bare that it disappoints anyone looking for even minor intellectual stimulation.

The Fountain

"The Fountain" is writer/director Darren Aronofsky's third feature film after "Pi" and "Requiem for a Dream," and is every bit as ambitious as his prior films. The film develops three separate stories spanning 1000 years of time. In the first, a 16th century Spanish conquistador (Hugh Jackman) is on a quest from Queen Isabella (Rachel Weisz) to find a mythical tree whose sap brings eternal life. Five hundred years later, Jackman plays a medical researcher who is seeking a cure for his wife's (again Weisz) brain cancer. Finally, in the 26th century, Jackman plays a man in a floating spacecraft searching the cosmos for the secret to resurrecting his wife.

The three plots are woven together nonlinearly, and collectively explore the themes of life, death and how love works

through both. Both the acting and the cinematography are phenomenal. While the film's eventual message about death is less profound than it could be, the journey to this conclusion constitutes one of the finest cinematic reflections that I have observed.

Equally impressive are the film's special effects, which were created largely without the aid of computer generated images. The film's cosmological footage, for example, is actually macroscopic footage of particles suspended in oil.

Another question worth pondering (and which I still do, two weeks after viewing it) is whether the actors play six characters or two characters in the three stories. Each possibility is open to interpretation and brings with it its own set of rich implications. With so many films in theaters currently, there are many opportunities for cinematic holiday cheer. As you finish your finals and head home, consider giving one of them a view. Sure, movies aren't what the Christmas season is about, but — in the opinion of this writer — they serve as a productive distraction.



FILE PHOTO

Daniel Craig puts his own spin on the Bond persona in 'Casino Royale,' the latest installment in the '007' series.

Texican rock in the FAC

BY CHRISTY GORDON
A&E Editor

Grammy winners Los Lonely Boys will be performing tonight in the Fine Arts Center.

The group is comprised of Henry, JoJo and Enrique "Ringo" Garza Jr., brothers hailing from San Angelo, Texas. Their father, Enrique Sr., was a popular conjunto musician in the 1970s and 1980s, which raised skepticism about the Boys' talent. However, the younger Garzas, who describe their music as "Texican rock and roll," have proved themselves worthy of attention from critics and listeners alike.

Their major label self-titled debut hit stores in 2004.

"Heaven," its lead single, made its way to number 16 on the Billboard Hot 100, while the album itself rose to number nine on the Billboard 200 Chart. This past summer, their sophomore effort, "Sacred," came along. "Sacred" was recorded at family friend Willie Nelson's Pedernales Studios. Nelson also lends his voice on the album, as does Enrique Sr.

In addition to rave reviews their studio albums continue to receive, the Boys are a solid live band. Although it won't feel very much like the average FAC concert, it is one worth noting.

The performance will be opened up by the Damnells, an indie outfit from Brooklyn. Tickets are \$10 with student ID.

Los Lonely Boys with The Damnells
Tonight at 8 p.m. in the FAC Auditorium
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Bad 'Santa'

BY LINDSAY MAKOWSKI
Staff Writer

"His time at the North Pole is about to go South."

Ironically, this tag-line for "The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause" is a good summary of how good the film actually was. I'm going to have to agree with the general public: sequels are not as good as the original. Although I find Tim Allen uproariously funny, I still think the first installment of "The Santa Clause" movies took the cake.

While home on Thanksgiving break, my two younger sisters and I had some "bonding" time and went to see this film. I wanted to see "Flushed Away," but hey, what does the eldest sister know? Apparently my assumption that the third movie in most trilogies pretty much stinks ("Austin Powers in Goldmember" and "The Lion King 1 1/2") was right. Granted, there are exceptions, like "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" or "Star Wars Episode 3: Revenge of the Sith" (I suppose if you want to get technical, that was really the sixth film in the Star Wars franchise, but you get the idea.)

"The Santa Clause 3" takes audiences on a whirlwind of excitement as Santa Clause (Tim Allen) and his wife, Mrs. Clause (Elizabeth Mitchell) are expecting their first child.

In an attempt to make his wife more comfortable and at ease, Santa brings her parents Sylvia (Ann-Margret) and Bud (Alan Arkin) up to the North Pole for Christmas. The family visit becomes the center of Santa's attention until Jack Frost (Martin Short) begins to wreak havoc on Santa's workshop. Santa soon finds himself in a compromising position — one that could change the meaning of Christmas forever.

The star-studded cast of "The Santa Clause 3" does not make up for its lack of "oomph!" As said before, the first one was definitely better than this one. Even the second Santa Clause movie was more entertaining and funny than this. Plus, where is David Krumholtz? I liked him as the head elf!

Overall, "The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause" did not deliver what was expected. The movie certainly kept my six-year-old sister entertained, but I found myself wanting to sneak into "Borat" or "Casino Royale." Don't pay seven dollars to see this movie. I'm betting "Happy Feet" was more enjoyable.