

ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO

(COLUMBIA)

Director Robert Rodriguez takes his *El Mariachi* series and tries to expand it into epic territory. Can't blame the man for trying, but...

This doesn't mean that... *Mexico* is a failure. Not exactly. The goofy, cartoonish action sequences from the first two films are here in full force, and if anything, it improves on the sheer straight-faced silliness that made the first two films so much fun.

No, the problem lies with the attempt to make a complex, multi-layered, epic tale. Melodrama (not to mention the borderline slapstick of the gunfights) is an incredibly difficult thing to mix with the genuine pathos the director is shooting for and, frankly, Rodriguez stumbles badly.

Perhaps if the film didn't star everyone under the sun... Beyond the return of Antonio Banderas and Salma Hayek, the film also stars Johnny Depp (brilliant as usual,) Mickey Rourke (not so brilliant,) William Dafoe (underused,) Enrique



Iglesias (!), and a virtually ignored Eva Mendez. That's not even taking into account Ruben Blades, Danny Trejo, Cheech Marin...

Not only am I getting away from the point, I'm doing it in the same way Rodriguez loses the multiple threads of the film's hopelessly convoluted plot. There are so many elements that none of them has time to take shape. While *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* is a noble attempt to take the flagrantly ridiculous and blend it with the serious, that's only worked once: John Woo's *The Killer*. That's because Woo kept it simple. And even Woo hasn't been

able to do it again.

All negativity aside, *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* would still make for an outstanding evening of dumb entertainment. Just keep the remote handy, and don't think too closely about what could've been.

(www.onceuponatimeinmexico.com)

CHAD VAN WAGNER

Barry Williams Show," the presentation (a mosaic of television screens) is so fitting that you can't deny its effectiveness.

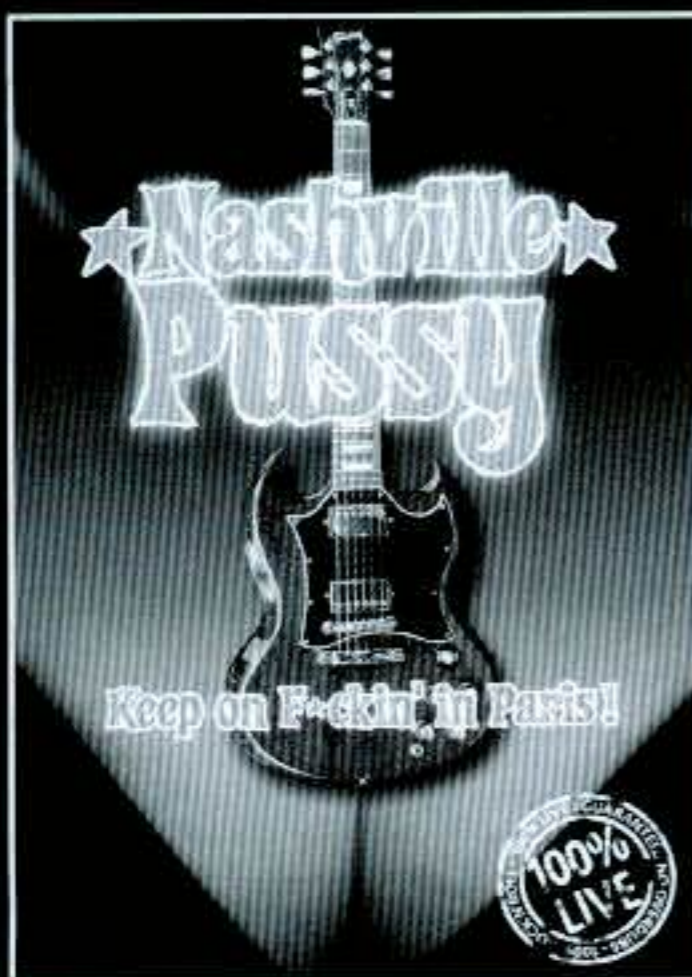
Not that Gabriel needs any help conveying the power of his songs. The man could be performing on a wooden plank and come off as a deity. His voice is absolutely flawless throughout: Effortless and graceful, filled to the brim with his trademark melancholy. When "Red Rain" or the classic "In Your Eyes" hit your ears, all the hairs on your body stand up. The crashing crescendos, the impeccable playing of his backing band (including his very talented daughter, Melanie, on backup vocals), and the tasteful use of electronic flourishes render sights and sounds that we the fans have known all along. Gabriel forever has his finger on the pulse of modernity, as if his last album, *Up*, didn't already show the world.

Funny how it takes an elder statesman like Gabriel to show us what music is really capable of. By incorporating laptops, world music instruments, and ethnic voices (Blind Boys of Alabama, as well as several Southeast Asian singers make guest appearances), Gabriel creates a world where crystal-clear quality and unflinching progressiveness don't get in the way of human emotion. Rather, they support the gorgeously-crafted songs like gravy on meat: Extra touches that not only make all the difference aesthetically, but never get in the way of the song's original impact and meaning. In the case of *Growing Up Live*, you get all that and a revelation for the eyes. What else can you ask for?

(2220 Colorado Ave. Santa Monica, CA 90404)

TIM DEN

NASHVILLE PUSSY



OVERALL, IT IS WELL-PRODUCED VISUALLY WITH EXCEPTIONALLY WELL-DONE AUDIO. SERIOUSLY, YOU CAN TURN OFF THE TV AND LISTEN TO THIS AS ONE HELLUVA GREAT LIVE ALBUM, IF YOU SO CHOOSE.

KEEP ON FUCKING IN PARIS (MVD)

I first saw Nashville Pussy perform in a cinderblock building off a dirt road in the middle of a huge cornfield in Kansas in 1997. It was so middle of nowhere, it creped even me out, and I LIVE in the middle of nowhere. The temperature was 90 degrees outside at 10pm, and about 100 inside the club. There were maybe 120 people there, but it was total rock'n'roll chaos (ironically, I've also been assigned a Zeke DVD, and I saw them for the first time at this show as well).

Many years have passed since then, and Nashville Pussy are doing exactly what they did back in that cinderblock club. Same gimmick, same gradual progression of disrobing by Ruyter (well, not totally, just down to her bra), and same barrage of Southern-fueled rock with almost zero breaks between songs. Hell, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. That slice of Southern wisdom fits the Pussy quite nicely.

This is most certainly a professionally-filmed DVD. I played it through my 600-watt surround system, and believe me, it rocked the Crevanator Compound way up here in the wilderness of New Hampshire. I can only guess how many cameras they had for this show. I'm guessing at least six. So you definitely get many different views of the stage. At times, it's overkill. For example, at one point, Ruyter takes a sip of water, and during that sip, we get three dif-

ferent camera views. But that's just a minor problem. Overall, it is well-produced visually with exceptionally well-done audio. Seriously, you can turn off the TV and listen to this as one helluva great live album, if you so choose. Of course, the biggest miracle about this high praise is that this was all done by FRENCHIES! Who'da thunk it? When was the last time the French did anything good?

On the main part of the DVD, you get a 16-song set, including tons of classic material from their *Let Them Eat Pussy* and *High as Hell* albums, along with tracks from 2002's *Say Something Nasty*. True to their roots of covering great songs, you also get an AC/DC cover ("Shot Down in Flames") and even better a Turbonegro cover ("Age of Pamparius").

The bonus features are pretty decent as well. You get a music video of "Say Something Nasty" with a great Roller Derby theme, a photo slideshow, and also a song lyric feature. Weirdest of all is the "Sing Along" option for a good chunk of the tracks. Yes, they replay the selected songs with subtitled lyrics so you can train to be the next Blaine. I just wish they'd used the bouncing ball technique, for old time's sake. Maybe on the next DVD...

(www.musicvideodistributors.com)

DUKE CREVANATOR