

Super Review of Me Me Me

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Love, Lust and Time

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by James in Music

Musicals? I'm kind of indifferent to them to be honest.

I've a funny feeling this is linked to endless Saturday mornings spent as a child performing at the Wetherby Music Centre, tooting away on my flute as part of an ever changing series of musical ensembles which rehearsed and performed and endless succession of medleys and songs from popular stage musicals. The man who ran it was into his musical theatre in a big way, and so it is hard sometimes to hear any of the elements of A Chorus Line or Les Miserables without immediately being transported back to counting 12 bars of silence before our particular section of woodwind were due to join the cacophony again.

As an adult, I concluded that there was something rather unsatisfactory about musicals as a form of theatre. The need to shoehorn song and dance numbers into the structure of a dramatic story often mean that plot, placing and character are all sacrificed in favour of a five minute interlude where the principles get to sing their heart out about the pot of jam they've just finished (or whatever spurious life event is deemed worthy of song at that point in the libretto). This uneasy balance was never more apparent when about 15 years ago I was gifted free tickets to a touring revival of Grease which had pitched up at the Bradford Alhambra. The story is now so familiar and the songs themselves such audience favourites, that it appeared that this production had been designed to downplay the former in favour of the latter. Rather than engage me with the plot, the whole performance was little more than a string of audience set-pieces linked together by the briefest of stilted dialogue. There was no room to appreciate the acting or to be drawn into the emotion of the tale, we as audience members were there to sit for three hours in anticipation of You're The One That I Want. Nothing more was required of us.

So even without mentioning the cosy tweeness and endless repeated musical figures of Andrew Lloyd-Webber, I can safely say I regard musicals as the lowest form of artistic expression.

Which is why I'm now about to recommend that you take time out to download and enjoy one.

Me Me Me is the latest creative opus from the popularly vilified Vile Pervert Jonathan King, a fascinating and engaging man whose works you will often find referenced here in my capacity as a fan and a friend of his. His first attempt at producing a musical film was the autobiographical Vile Pervert which featured the man himself playing all the characters involved. For this new production the stakes and indeed production values have been raised. Professionally shot, and with actual proper actors playing many of the roles, this is a musical film designed to be viewed on its own merits, and not simply as a passing curiosity. Best of all, you can stream or download it all for absolutely nothing.

Me Me Me spins the tale of Jonny Bambino, a graffiti artist who is turning heads all over London and who after being tracked down by a tabloid newspaper is turned into a pop star, complete with three straight Number One hits. When his final work of graffiti is deemed to have crossed a line, the previously benign media turns on their creation - all leading to a Shakespearian tragedy as star crossed lovers pay the ultimate price for media hysteria.

Let's deal with the negatives first of all. Despite the best efforts of all involved and some extremely creative thinking in terms of staging and production, much of Me Me Me struggles to rise beyond the level of a student degree presentation. Some of the dialogue is stilted and clunky, scenes are present for no reason other than to shoehorn in an irrelevant song, and the pacing is so inconsistent you are sometimes fighting the urge to skip through the exposition to the next musical

performance. Leading lady Scarlett Emmanuelle is acceptably pleasing on the eye and capable of voice but Red Light One duo Henry and Rupert Stansall who play the male leads are far better at looking pretty as they are musicians and far better musicians than they are actors. That much is obvious.

Yet for all these flaws, I found it hard to resist the charm of the film. What saves it is the overall vision, the salient points made about media created darlings and the inevitable downfalls which result, the sheer labour of love its production clearly was for everyone involved, but most importantly of all the music. The soundtrack to the film is crammed with memorable songs and productions, as I mentioned above not all of which are necessarily relevant to the plot, but all of which you find yourself humming for days afterwards. Most crucially for a film about a pop star, Johnny Bambino's "singles" are believably radio and chart-friendly and stand head and shoulders above much pop music you may have heard this year. Plus you get the feeling that Mr King has literally been waiting 25 years to make full use of the recordings by failed rock supergroup Gogmagogg which now have pride of place in the film and prove that we are all indeed Living In A Fucking Timewarp.

Possibly the highest compliment I can give the production is that every time I watch it I'm instantly picturing it all on a West End stage, imagining sets and chorus lines, grand entrances and big production numbers. For a high quality but still endearingly amateur production, it all just seems to work and even the half interested viewer intent on staying for the first five minutes may well be surprised to discover they are still there at the end - even if the final dénouement is a little rushed and underplayed (although so was the final act of Zeffirelli's Romeo and Juliet and nobody ever seemed to mind).

My own personal favourite moment of Me Me Me comes at the close of what on stage might be seen as the first act, as impresario Ben Volio takes to the stage to show Bambino and crew just what makes him the man to propel them to pop stardom. A long lost track performed by a much younger King himself, this wound up being my favourite musical moment of the summer and a song which helped me see the brighter side of some very dark moments earlier this summer.

Me Me Me is available online to watch in full at its website, with the full soundtrack on sale on iTunes. A soundtrack which includes Penny, three minutes which will leave you with a day-long grin. Enjoy.