DVD REVIEWS

Spellbound

Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment



MOVIE - 4.5 stars
EXTRAS - 4 stars

On paper, a documentary about the US National Spelling Bee doesn't sound like the most interesting movie in the world. Yet it is one of the most fascinating films of 2003, with a more involving storyline than the majority of the nonsense that Hollywood cranks out.

Rather than just being about a spelling contest, *Spellbound* becomes a study of everything that America stands for. It represents the idea that the US is the land of opportunity for all of its citizens. That includes the many immigrants, the working class families or even the people who can afford to pay for specialist coaches and teachers to help the budding speller - theoretically at least, they are all equal.

Spellbound follows eight children from every walk of life in every corner of America as they strive to be the best speller. It gives an insight into each child's background, how they got to the national contest and talks about their motivation for taking part. For some it represents the chance to fulfill the so-called American Dream and become a success, while others see it as an opportunity to move forward and find the possibilities that weren't available to their parents.

The actual spelling bee is a peculiar experience. It is shown live on ESPN, legitimising the event, yet it is a slow-moving, almost painful thing to watch - kids shudder when given really tough words, and then maintain they knew every else's words after they are eliminated.

The remarkable thing about *Spellbound* is that despite the fact that it is a documentary, it has a real element of suspense to it. Waiting to see how the Spelling Bee turns out and whether one of the featured kids turns out to be the eventual champion is remarkably tense and will keep viewers involved until the every end. It is hard not to get involved with the likes of Harry, a hyperactive kid who contorts his face and body as he tries to bring together the right letters in the right order, or Ted, the outsider who seems awkward whatever he does.

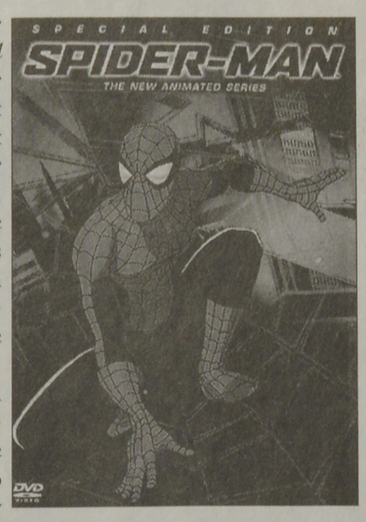
Spellbound is the epitome of everything that a wonderful documentary should be- it tells a very human story that is both revealing and absorbing. Better still, it somehow manages to take a subject that shouldn't really be particularly interesting and turns it into a universal tale of a struggle against adversity and eventual triumph. Quite simply, this is one of last year's best movies.

The extras really do help to round out this wonderful DVD. The commentary track adds a lot of additional information, both behind the scenes and the film making process. More interesting is the bonus footage which features segments on three further spellers, all of which are just as good as anything in the actual movie. The "Where Are They Now?" section features written updates on the all the spellers who have all now moved on to college and so on - not surprisingly there are no sinister developments that would make an entertaining Movie Of The Week.

Extras: Filmmaker's Commentary Track, Bonus Footage: 3 Additional Spellers, Where Are They Now? Updates On All 8 Profiled Spellers, Theatrical Trailers, DVD-ROM Features: Interactive Hangman Game & Educational Guide

Spider-Man: The New Animated Series

Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment



MOVIE - 3.5 stars
EXTRAS - 2 stars

First aired last year as a series for MTV, *Spider-Man: The New Animated Series* follows the 2002 film, as Peter Parker, his sometimes-sweetheart Mary Jane Watson (MJ) and best friend Harry Osborne tackle their first year at Empire State University. For Parker, balancing his college work with full-time superhero duties is complicated at best, especially when Mary Jane's got a crush on Spider-Man, and Harry thinks the webslinger killed his father.

The plot lines are pretty thin: in each episode poor, naïve Spider-Man/Peter Parker is trying to prove himself to the world while having to deal with a villain who inevitably frames Spiderman for a crime. Really, the guy just can't catch a break.

Unlike most animated shows, Spider-Man works character development like a drama. It's necessary, since the show's target audience is clearly the teen/twenty-something crowd (as evidenced by the pop culture references, not-so-subtle nods to sex, and MJ's continually bare midriff). There's a very definite continuity between episodes, which makes the show more engaging than expected; miss an episode and you'll have some catching up to do. Villains return throughout the season, and characters build in each episode.

Unfortunately, a lot of our favourite villains are missing from the new show. Though Kingpin and Dr. Connors/Lizard factor in a couple of episodes, it would have been nice to see Dr. Octopus, Venom, or Rhino show up. Most of the new baddies are interesting and plausible enough, but some edge on being ridiculous (how can someone with no superpowers run, jump, and dive off buildings like Spider-Man? Geez).

What really sets this show apart from other Spider-Man cartoons (and there have been quite a few) is its visuals. Simply put: the CG animation is astounding. Facial movements, walking, and other details that are often completely unrealistic in CG animation are reproduced stunningly here, and the fight scenes – especially those that involve Spider-Man swinging around New York City – are mind-blowing.

The biggest mistep: the casting of Neil Patrick Harris (Doogie Howser) as Spider-Man is bloody awful. While the other voices work pretty well, Harris' delivery is off and he makes Spider-Man's trademark witty catchphrases sound terrible. In the extras, he jokes about how he didn't think much of the series at first, and really just needed some work. Singer Lisa Loeb voices MJ and former-90210-er Ian Ziering is Harry. Also guesting: Rob Zombie, Eve, Michael Clarke Duncan, *Buffy*'s James Marsters, and, for some reason, Kathy Griffin.

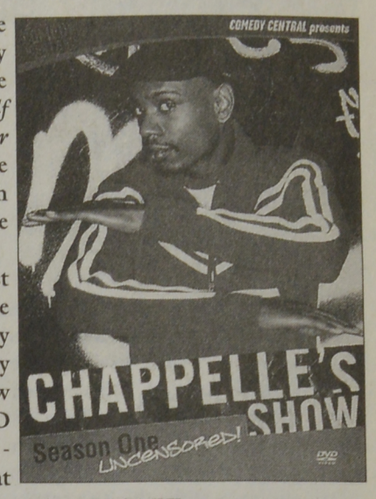
The special features are nothing spectacular. The audio commentaries and "Spider Facts" (mostly casting info that pops up during the episodes) are tedious at best, and fake blooper reels are never funny (with the exception of in Pixar films). The "Making Of" featurettes are interesting, but only when they show the fascinating, painstakingly slow work put into realistically animating the character's faces. Most of the features don't fill the entire screen either; they float, boxed, inside the frame of the screen, with blue and red Spider-Man colours flashing around. It's freakin' distracting.

- Sean Patrick Sullivan

Extras: Filmmakers & Cast Commentary Track, Amazing Spider-Facts, Cast and Crew Filmographies, Test Footage, Outtake Reel, The Making of Spiderman Featurettes.

Chappelle's Show: Season One Uncensored

Comedy Central/Paramount



MOVIE - 4 stars
EXTRAS - 3.5 stars

Dave Chappelle is one of those comedians whose face is instantly familiar, thanks to his many movie appearances (including the likes of *Half Baked* (which he also wrote), *Undercover Brother* and more audience friendly fare like *You've Got Mail*), but it is only with his own television show that his true comedic ability is becoming apparent.

Chappelle's Show is one of the funniest sketch comedy shows on television at the moment. In the US, it airs on Comedy Central, but thankfully The Comedy Network in Canada has started to show it too. The real difference with the DVD version is that it is totally uncensored - nothing is beeped or blurred, and that helps to reveal the rawness of the material. There are 12 episodes in total, but most clock in at under 20 minutes because the majority of musical performances have been removed, but that still leaves more than four hours of hilarity.

To say that *Chappelle's Show* is edgy or takes risks would be an understatement. There is so many segments that are going to offend people, that at times it seems like all he is interested in doing is pushing the envelope. And that could potentially be a problem except for the fact that it is also hilarious, and manages to find humour in absolutely any situation. For example, there's Clayton Bigsby, a blind white supremacist who doesn't actually know he is black (and the sketch even has a punchline you won't see coming), or Tyrone Biggums, a friendly crack addict who instructs an elementary school class on how to get high. Absolutely nothing is out of bounds.

It isn't just character-driven sketches. Paul Mooney, a former scriptwriter for Richard Pryor, has a segment called "Ask A Black Dude" where people can ask those burning questions that haunt us all. There are also movie and commercial parodies of a quality that must make *Saturday Night Live* insanely jealous - highlights includes *The Matrix* and the Mitsubishi ad with the girl dancing in the car, but every episode has some absolute gems.

The biggest thing that *Chappelle's Show* has going for it is consistency. Every single episode is hilarious, with hardly any sketches that don't work. The only slight problem is that because these episodes are a couple of years old, some of the references are a little bit dated; not a major annoyance because sketches about R Kelly liking to pee on people will always be funny.

The extras aren't too bad, although the 29 minutes of uncensored bloopers and deleted scenes cover a lot of the same ground as those seen in the actual shows. That is also true of the additional footage of Ask A Black Dude, but there are still a few laughs to be had. The best of the extras is the commentary that accompanies five of the 12 episodes. Chappelle is joined by the show's co-creator Neal Brennan and they talk about making the show, unused ideas and other funny thoughts that enter their heads.

Extras: Commentary Track for Five Episodes, Bloopers & Deleted Scenes, Unaired 'Ask A Black Dude' Footage, Comedy Central Quickies.

Le Divorce

20th Century Fox

MOVIE - 2 stars
EXTRAS - 1 star

Some people, myself included, have seen enough of Merchant Ivory's costume dramas to last a lifetime. While their nuanced take on society and love was initially interesting, it eventually became like painting by numbers and their last few films have not been particularly successful. So their latest venture, *Le Divorce*, takes their comedy of manners to modern day Paris and tries to bring things right up to date.

Though billed as a romantic comedy, *Le Divorce* isn't. Sure there are romantic moments and even a handful of laughs (although the belly laughs are few and far between), it is more of a drama that is trying hard to find a potential audience. The problem is that that audience is going to be looking for something light and jolly, and with a combination of unlikeable characters and some very dark plot element, *Le Divorce* is very likely to be a disappointment.

The movie tells the story of Roxy (Naomi Watts), an American in Paris whose husband has just walked out on her, leaving her pregnant and at odds with the French society that seems to battle her at every turn. She is joined by her flighty younger sister Isobel (Kate Hudson) whose sole reason for visiting appears to be embracing the French lifestyle. So she takes a lover, becomes a mistress, receives expensive gifts and has some adventures in a classy underwear store.

Much of the cultural observations that the movie depends on are kind of stereotyped and despite its best attempts to be witty and clever, there's no real substance here and any bigger intentions the movie might have had get lost along the way. Add to that a pointless subplot about a valuable painting, some uncharacteristic violence (a suicide attempt and a rather convenient murder) and a whole bunch of cameos from the likes of Stockard Channing, Glenn Close, Bebe Neuwirth and Matthew Modine, and the movie becomes a cluttered mess that isn't worthy of the talent involved.

Le Divorce seems like a movie that is in love with all things French, yet it shows a lot of contempt for them. It really doesn't know what it wants to be, and that lack of focus makes it a very hard film to watch. There are some positives though - the city of Paris looks absolutely glorious and there are some decent performances from actors who can rise above the mire. But at the end of the day, there's little reason to recommend this mess.

Extras: Theatrical Trailers

General Elections

To vote online visit the Student Union website at:
http://www.unbf.ca/unbsu/election/

Candidate Names & Positions
Note: the number in brackets following the position title indicates the number of seats available for this position.

Student Union Positions

President (1)
- Fournier, Charles (Chuck)
- Johns, Steven
- LeBlanc, Greg
- Ouellette, Nicholas (Nick)

Vice President Executive (1)
- Lockhart, Desmond
- Matheson, Jeff

Vice President University Affairs (1)
- Brewer, Jeff
- Zhang, Wei

Vice President Student Services (1)
- Cole, Neil
- Manderson, Lynette

Vice President Finance (1)
- Baker, Adam

Arts Representative (5)
- Fontaine, Marieve
- Iezzi, Pamela
- Langille, Ben
- Macoomb, John Hubert
- MacDonald, Peter

Business Administration Representative (3)
- Ross, Laura

Computer Science Representative (1)
- Durling, Scott

Education Representative (2)

Engineering Representative (3)
- Perry, Sean
- Strong, Justin
- Velazquez, Rafael

Forestry Representative (1)
- Colden, Val

International Student Representative (1)
- Neogi, Souvik
- Ogana, Lydia

Kinesiology Representative (1)
- McCully, Matthew

Law Representative (1)
- Brown, Jordan
- Stoddart, Toby

Nursing Representative (1)
- Beckett, Matthew

Renaissance College Representative (1)
- El-Khoury, Youssef
- Shay, Raphael

Residence Student Representative (1)
- Chiasson, Ciana
- Mott, Jeff

Science Representative (2)
- Johnson, Leona

Student at Large Representative (2)
- Cartwright, Alexis
- Powe, Erin
- Skinner, Lyle Matthew

Board of Governors Positions

Board of Governors (2)
- El-Khoury, Youssef
- Fournier, Charles (Chuck)
- Johns, Steven
- LeBlanc, Greg
- Ouellette, Nicholas (Nick)

University Senate Positions

Senate 1- year Seat (4)
- Brewer, Jeff
- Butler, David
- Chiasson, Ciana
- Matheson, Jeff
- Near, Anthony
- Zhang, Wei

Senate 2-year Seat (1)
- Mellish, David, R.
- Skinner, Lyle Matthew
- Tshomo, Sherub

Valedictorian Positions

Valedictorian Ceremony 'A'
- Moffatt, Eric

Valedictorian Ceremony 'B'
- Bradbury, Robert
- Earle, Pamela
- Hull, Meghan
- Jones, Laurie

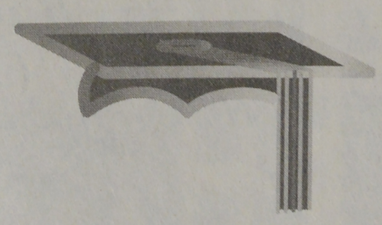
Valedictorian Ceremony 'C'
- Harmon, John Paul
- Mitchell, Michael D
- Palmer, Erin

STUDENT UNION UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

Voting Ends Friday Feb 27 at midnight

FOR ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THE ELECTION PLEASE E-MAIL: CRO@UNB.CA

Grad Class Formal



March 12 SUB
9-1 P.M.

Tickets On Sale
March 8-12

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Kristina Hildebrand

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Jessica Hood

Law
Valana Deighan

Nursing
Katja Schade

Renaissance College
Jeff Grandy

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Melissa Brooks