

Movie Review: 'U2 3D'

by *George_Varga*

Almost? Almost. Almost!

No other rock concert film, past or present, will inspire viewers to repeatedly think "almost" as much as "U2 3D," which opens Wednesday at a lone area theater and is billed as the first live action, real-time, digital 3-D film ever.

'U2 3D' - Watching U2 perform in 3-D on an IMAX screen, in 5.2 Surround Sound, is an eye- and ear-popping experience. CNS Photo courtesy of 3ality Digital. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Watching U2 perform in 3-D on an IMAX screen, in 5.2 Surround Sound, is an eye- and ear-popping experience.

By any description, no previous rock film has come so close to making you feel like you're "almost" there, in the middle of the action, on stage with the band. That's "almost" as in you almost feel like the tip of Adam Clayton's Fender bass is about to hit you in the face at one point, and you "almost" feel like you can reach out and snatch one of The Edge's guitar picks from his microphone stand during "Beautiful Day." At other points, you almost feel as if the hands of the ecstatic audience members are an inch away, waiting for your high-five.

With few lapses, nearly every visceral second of this 85-minute film will make you feel a lot of those almost sensations. This accounts for a large part of its eye-popping charm and allure. It may also be the film's downfall, but more on that later.

A massive undertaking that sets a new standard for almost transforming a movie theater into a bigger-than-life concert experience, it was filmed at stadium shows in Mexico, Brazil, Chile and Argentina during U2's 2005/2006 world tour. A final song, the coda-like "Yahweh" (done over the closing credits), was apparently shot at an Australian show with less of a visual emphasis.

The movie eschews any interview segments and backstage footage, which constituted a significant portion of U2's previous concert flick, 1988's "Rattle and Hum." Instead, the focus is on the music, with most of lead singer Bono's between-song comments trimmed to a bare minimum.

This is generally a sound move. But the decision to include only 14 songs, about eight fewer than most concerts during the tour, is not.

Surely, most attendees will be U2 fans eager to savor as much of the band as possible on the big screen, not idle viewers who decided to attend at the last minute after failing to get into a screening of "Alvin and the Chipmunks."

Also missing, with just one exception, are the impromptu snippets of classics by other artists - such as Al Green's "Take Me to the River" or Patti Smith's "People Have the Power" - that Bono and his band mates often inject to make each U2 concert a special, in-the-moment experience.

As a consequence, despite terrific versions of such favorites as "Bullet the Blue Sky," "Where the Streets Have No Name" and the triumphant "Pride (In the Name of Love)," the film has a truncated feel that no amount of visual razzle-dazzle can counter-balance.

The other problem is that razzle-dazzle itself. As overwhelming as the film is visually, the sense of sameness that gradually begins to set in diminishes the film's "wow" factor. The initial peaks "U2 3D" soars to are heady indeed; less so when they are revisited time and again in less than 90 minutes.

A notable exception occurs during an encore of "The Fly," when the use of live performance footage and computer graphics takes viewers into a new realm altogether. It's almost enough to suggest another, even better, film still waiting to be made.

National Geographic Presentation of a 3ality Digital production. Directors: Catherine Owens, Mark Pellington. Cast: U2. Running time: 1 hour, 25 minutes. Rated G. 3 stars.

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