

Stars making music about bedrooms, not in them

After two years on the road, the montreal pop band has learned a few things about making music—and gained the cash to do it

musicpreview

Stars

With *Miracle Fortress*
Wednesday, 21 November at 8pm
Edmonton Event Centre

PAUL BLINOV
Arts & Entertainment Editor

If there's one thing to be said about Amy Millan, the female co-vocalist of Stars, it's that she's honest. Even in the midst of discussing issues that would cast her band in a particularly positive light—their decision to make their tour eco-friendly, for example—she's not the type to just suck up praise she feels is undeserved. Instead, she's more than willing to give her two cents on the issue.

"Eco-friendly is turning into the new organic, where there's just a lot of bullshit involved," Millan admits over a crackly phone line. "We're still on a bus, and we're still pumping that bus full of gas, and we're still creating lots and lots of garbage with eleven people living in one space. But we're trying to put money towards some balancing points."

Balancing odds and ends have always been a part of Stars' two-headed game, with Millan trading off lead-singer duties with Torquill Campbell, and every member of the band contributing to the songwriting. But for the first time in their seven-year career, the band is finding that the scales have been tipped in their favour—financially, at least.

After the success and years of touring that 2004's *Set Yourself on Fire* generated, the band found themselves with unusually full wallets when heading to the studio to record their follow-up.



"We had more money; we never had any money to make a record before," Millan says. "This was the first time where we had a considerable budget, where we didn't have to use one microphone and a blanket as isolation. So we took advantage of it."

"[Spending a lot of money is] definitely not necessary to make a good record," she continues. "But we had made our past three records in our bedrooms, so it was the first time we

were like 'let's spend the money and see what happens.'"

The resulting album, *In Our Bedroom After the War*, was not only influenced by the extra cash, but also by the time spent working out songs on tour. All the road time helped sharpen the band together, making them much more confident in recording in a room together as opposed to one at a time through a computer.

"[Touring] definitely made us

more confident as a live band and playing together live," she explains. "A lot of the songs that had been written before had been done [separate]: Chris and Evan would record onto the computer, and Torq and I would work off the computer. But when we went to record *In Our Bedroom*, everything was done off-the-floor, rather than calculated through tracking. It was done with a really live feel."

With so much success over the

past few years, it's no surprise that the band's taking a little time to pursue alternative artistic endeavors—Millan released a solo disc, *Honey from the Tombs*, in 2006—but when it comes to getting back together with her band, Millan doesn't see Stars as just work and no play.

"I think of it more as my wife, and the other projects are more like mistresses," she laughs. "I feel very dedicated to the wife."

Love in the Time of Cholera a tangled trap

filmreview

Love in the Time of Cholera

Now Playing
Directed by Mike Newell
Starring Javier Bardem, Giovanna Mezzogiorno, and Benjamin Bratt

KRISTINA DE GUZMAN
Arts & Entertainment Staff

When critics of the 1985 novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* argued that Gabriel García Márquez wrote a story lacking so much depth that the inattentive reader might find themselves lured by its sweetness and simplicity, Márquez fuelled the argument even more with his candid agreement: "You have to be careful not to fall into my trap." Márquez is right to be proud: his words have followed his story of timeless love all the way to Mike Newell's film adaptation.

Love in the Time of Cholera begins with the death of Dr Juvenal Urbito (Benjamin Bratt). As church bells ring, we see another old man and a woman significantly younger than him, post-coitus, in another part of town. Sensing that someone

has died, the man quickly leaves his bedmate, and the next thing we know, he's at Dr Urbito's home, offering condolences to the mourning widow Fermina (Giovanna Mezzogiorno). We discover that this man is Florentino Ariza (Javier Bardem), and that he has waited "51 years, nine months, and four days" for this moment.

Up until this moment, the film lacked emotional pull; it's been difficult to tell if Fermina's bland expression is supposed to be a reflection of her true feelings or if it's only a bad acting choice by Mezzogiorno. But in that one scene, the fire that's been absent from the film thus far suddenly begins to blaze.

Love in the Time of Cholera hops around the idea of how love can be insane, real, or both.

After Florentino pours his heart out to Fermina, she reacts with rage, telling him that she never wants to see him again, and Mezzogiorno reveals

herself to be quite a skillful actress. The same goes for Javier Bardem; despite having first witnessed Florentino in a rendezvous with another woman, the content and feeling of his proclamation to Fermina has you believing that he's genuinely loved her for a very long time. The story is between these two souls creates a feeling of curiosity; we want to know what the story of their romance is.

Unfortunately, that story is mostly skeletal, with few parts fleshed out to satisfaction. We're taken to the Colombian town of Cardenega in the late-19th century and watch Florentino and Fermina grow from youth into old age, but the depiction of their young love is idealistic and superficial. Sadly, actor-actress chemistry can't save the sappy love story because there's simply none that exists between Mezzogiorno and Unax Ugalde, who plays Fermino in his adolescence.

The obstacles of the doomed relationship—namely Fermina's controlling father (John Leguizamo) who comes off more as an abusive husband—seems trivial because key details and motivations have been left out. As a result, when Fermina is forced to move away and later marries Dr Urbito, Florentino's continued



obsession is incomprehensible after so much time apart and so many women.

Clearly, his "cholera" is his idealistic love for this woman who has rejected him. But like any other person suffering from a horrible disease, you can't help but feel a hint of sympathy for the man. When Bardem resumes the role of Florentino, it's a more-than-welcomed change, as he shows effortlessly why his character

is both pathetic and dignified.

Love in the Time of Cholera hops around the idea of how love can be insane, real, or both. It's frustrating to witness how love can be an irrational obsession, but that feeling will be met with a tug at the heartstrings at how love can also be an unwavering force. You may very well end up in a trap, wondering how you got there—but that was Márquez's whole point.