

# Ritter uses his imagination to make written conquests

Touring with his band behind *The Historical Conquests of Josh Ritter*, the Idaho rocker isn't constrained to writing about his life



## musicpreview

### Josh Ritter

With Emm Gryner  
Wednesday, 27 February at 7pm  
Myer Horowitz Theatre

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Arts & Entertainment Staff

While shivering in the New York cold, Idaho-grown folk-rocker Josh Ritter is a little nervous to start touring in the much more severe Canadian winter. Fortunately, creativity breeds solutions to any problem, and he has a number of potential solutions for our frigid temperatures.

"It's gonna be cold there; we'll have to stick together, huddle in the lobby with some whiskey. It's gonna be fun and rowdy, so people should bring their rowdy shoes—bring their Corb Lund boots."

For those who packed the Powerplant for his show last year, the idea of a foot-stompin' show sets up a radically different concert than what Ritter, then alone, presented. Even though he enjoys the solo spotlight, with his full band in tow this time around, he's not a lone man with a guitar and dimmed lights.

"I love touring on my own. You get so sharp [that] you pick up on all the little things in the room. You pick up everything about the crowd," Ritter says with obvious enthusiasm in his voice. "[But] I do think when you play with a band it can broaden the scope. It can make the highs higher and the lows lower. You have a more dynamic effect right off the bat, but you have to work hard to make sure the concentration is there, that everybody's working for the same thing and pushing the songs forward. When it's all firing, it's just exciting, really. It feels like you're strapped to the front of a locomotive."

An apparent love of performing isn't the only thing Josh Ritter has going for him as an artist. As any fan can attest, it's his heartfelt and imaginative lyrics that have enraptured audiences, and although he writes about things to which most people can easily relate, he stresses that they aren't his personal stories.

"I personally don't like autobiographical song writing; I don't like the idea that I'm being assaulted by somebody's story of their life," Ritter explains. "It's too personal for me. I don't like to feel like I'm reading somebody's diary. If every song in the world is about the girl we just broke up with or [who] just broke up with us, what's the point of that?"

"I think, at a certain point, you have to use your imagination," he continues. "That's when things get really exciting because you can make anything happen in your song. Even if it's a small kind of moment, you can try to turn it into something else by giving it a little twist. For me, that's the fun of it: I get to move all these little characters around and get them in love or kill them off if I want to."

The storytelling element of Ritter's music is clear in his latest album *The Historical Conquests of Josh Ritter*. Songs like "The Temptation of Adam" tell clear and vivid stories, but modern folk songs aren't the only things Ritter has been writing. After listing his extensive reading list, he mentioned the writing project on the side.

"I'm working on a novel. It's so different than writing songs. I'm having a blast, [and] it's really great. I'm giving it a shot, and we'll see where it goes."

As much as he may like trying new forms of penmanship, Ritter has plenty of experience performing for a crowd. With full band in tow, his Myer Horowitz show promises to be just as rowdy and unpredictable as the singer-songwriter himself.

# Be Kind Rewind a distracted gem

## filmreview

### Be Kind Rewind

Now Playing  
Directed by Michael Gondry  
Starring Jack Black, Mos Def, Danny Glover, and Sigourney Weaver

SEAN STEELS  
Arts & Entertainment Staff

Anyone watching *Be Kind Rewind* expecting a stylistic heir to *Nacho Libre* or even a tight spotlight on the high-decibel antics of Jack Black might be a little disappointed. In fact, the film features perhaps the most well-rounded performance seen from the portly pot smoker since his *High Fidelity* days.

The story centres around a small video rental store owned by a Mr Fletcher (Danny Glover) and located in gritty Passaic, New Jersey. When Fletcher goes away on a business trip, he leaves Mike (Mos Def) in charge of the store. Mike's only instructions are to keep Jerry (Jack Black) out, but things go awry, Jerry becomes magnetized in a bungled and conspiracy theory-mired act of vandalism, and every tape in the store is erased.

Instead of buying new tapes, Mike and Jerry decide that they'll make their own versions of the films, resulting in a series of truly delightful, creative, and low-budget remakes.

If there's someone to thank for these cinematic gems, it's surely

Michael Gondry. The director behind *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and writer/director of *The Science of Sleep* seems to be a never-ending fountain of quirky ways to film the mundane. These ideas escalate from cheaply shot gag scenes to incredible camera tricks.

**Despite great on-screen chemistry and creative props, *Be Kind Rewind* feels distracted. The whole film is mired in irrelevant and, in the end, fairly useless subplots.**

From *Robocop* to *Driving Miss Daisy*, *The Lion King* to *Ghostbusters*, there's no limit to what Mike and Jerry shoot. Their *Men In Black* even comes complete with the memorable scene of their rocket car driving upside down through a traffic tunnel.

The performances given by Black, Glover, and Mos Def throughout the film are also on par with some of their individual best works. Black shares the spotlight comfortably with Mos Def, and screen time is evenly divided: Jerry's bawdy grandeur never completely overpowers Mike's meek, emotive character, and the audience is never left too long without a good laugh. In fact, it's the great

performances from Black and Mos Def that elevate Gondry's innovative shots from art house material to a long-shot for box office hit.

But despite great on-screen chemistry and creative props, *Be Kind Rewind* still feels distracted. The whole film is mired in irrelevant and, in the end, fairly useless subplots.

For example, early on, Jerry and Mike meet Alma (Melonie Diaz), a painfully unfunny and awkward dry-cleaning girl from around the block Alma becomes a staple starlet of their movies and, like clockwork, a love triangle ensues. Well, maybe love triangle is the wrong word: Mike becomes jealous of the non-existent relationship between Alma and Jerry. He finally admits his feeble crush on her just in time for the potential relationship to be swept up in the finale and never mentioned again.

The whole movie is also undercut by strong themes of community cohesiveness and being proud of your neighborhood. Unfortunately, the majority of the community-building scenes are more corny than heartfelt. They're kind of like a bad high-school remake of *Boyz n the Hood*—which, ironically, is actually remade in the film.

Throw in a random and microscopic cameo by Sigourney Weaver as a blood-sucking corporate lackey with these other subplots, and the product is a film with all the triumvirate components of a great movie (good acting, innovative direction, and a great story idea) but which distracts the audience to the point of losing interest.

