Above the Rim intrigues with powerful themes

By Christopher Chiu

Above the Rim is an intrinsically strong film that, like its characters, overcomes many obstacles. With a plot that pits good against evil, it could have degenerated into an overwrought soap opera, but such is not the case. And while basketball is its backdrop, it is one of the underlying themes in this film, alongside themes of redemption, love, and identity. The film is not simply a collection of highlights. Instead of tumbling into these pitfalls, director Jeff Pollack and the talented cast created a powerful drama without clichés.

The movie itself is about Kyle-Woo Wilson (Duane Martin), a high school basketball phenom who's being courted to get recruited by Gonzaga, a Catholic university in Washington. As the film develops, a struggle ensues over who will control his future. Through his best friend Birdie (Wayans), Kyle is introduced to Birdie (Tupac Shakur), a ruthless drug dealer who always sports a smile on his face and a razor in his mouth. Birdie tries to recruit Kyle to work for him using money and women as bait. Birdie has several factors working against him, though: Malika (Toni Trucks), the boy's mother, and Shep (Leon), a former high school basketball star who now works as a security guard. This rather central conflict was established in the film's opening sequence, setting the stage for a high school basketball star's dilemma.

Kyle-Lee Watson (Duane Martin, left) and Bugaloo (Marlon Wayans) scope out the basketball court in Above the Rim.

By Barry Michael Cooper

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Monks’ exquisite Chant tops charts, surprises all

CHANT
deg Reeds.

J. Michael Andreini

Perhaps the music world moves in circles, as the fashion world purportedly does. If this is the case, then the largest popular group from Spain has just closed a particularly large loop. The number one album — on the Spanish album charts for five weeks earlier this year — featured music dating back to the middle ages. A group of Benedictine monks from an 11th-century monastery in northern Spain have released a CD of their favorite Gregorian chants. The album sold 230,000 copies in its first month. It was released in the United States earlier this month.

Chant features 19 tracks for nearly an hour of total playing time. Each chant flows into the next with almost no break between pieces, giving the unaccompanied melodies a certain luminous quality to them. The group considered all dissonance "evil" and inappropriate to be sung during the days of the church.

On the surface, then, it may seem as though all the chants sound the same. Slight changes from one to the next, however, give a genuine sense of progression. Although no harmony backs the melodies up, the melodies themselves have structure that changes. The melodies are modal and are based on different scales (called modes). The changing modes gives the chants a type of harmonic movement that keeps the listener interested. Never in the recording does the chanting get boring.

The quality of the recording itself is phenomenal. The amount of reverberation in the voices of the choir gives the listener the feeling that he is standing in the middle of an ancient cathedral, watching a procession of candle-bearing monks making their way to the front to accommodate the Mass.

The quality of the recording is such that it reminds the listener that these chants were born in the Middle Ages and were used in the church. The monks, however, are not religious in their music. The recording has been subsidized by grants from governments and foundations. The monks are monks for reasons other than to sing their chants. The monks, however, are not religious in their music. The recording has been subsidized by grants from governments and foundations. The monks are monks for reasons other than to sing their chants.

CHART

The Benedictine Monks at Santo Domingo de Silos.

When the monks released their first CD, "Monks’ Chant," it brought them a great deal of publicity. But the monks were not satisfied with that. They wanted more. They wanted to reach a wider audience. So they decided to release a new CD, "Monks’ Chant II," which features many of the chants that were popular in the 8th and 9th centuries.

Although the monks are66b)respond, they did leave the monastery for the first time in over 20 years in order to record a television special. The recording is called "The Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos" and was released in Spain in late 1994. It has been a great success, reaching number one on the classical charts in Spain.

The Benedictine Monks at Santo Domingo de Silos.

Although the Benedictine Monks at Santo Domingo de Silos have a long history of Christianity, they have also been involved in other activities. In the 20th century, the monks were involved in the development of a new form of music called "liturgical music." This music is designed to be used in religious services and is based on Gregorian chant.

Monks’ Chant has a broad appeal because it is a quality recording of esoteric music. It is an honest attempt to bring the liturgical music of the 8th and 9th centuries to a wider audience. It is a great success and has been well-received by critics and audiences alike.

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