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REVIEWS

***A Knight's Tale* (US, 2001), written and directed by Brian Helgeland.**

Not since Ving Rhames's character promised to "get medieval" in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) has Hollywood made Middle Age violence so hip and exuberantly entertaining. In the early summer release *A Knight's Tale*, writer-director Brian Helgeland brazenly and innovatively embraces the anachronism that is so impossible to escape when adapting the Middle Ages to the screen, and he does so by teaming his tale of an unlikely fourteenth-century jousting champion with lively dialogue, exquisitely modernized costumes, and frequent references to current pop and cinema culture. It is arguably the music, however, that makes the movie such riotous fun to watch, and Helgeland's pounding soundtrack of 1970s rock anthems does much to make the trans-Channel world of medieval jousting not only familiar but as exhilarating and exciting as the great amphitheater rock concerts that were once the staple of every high school career. From William Thatcher's (Heath Ledger) debut joust, when the commoner illegally stands in for his unexpectedly deceased lord, we chant along with throngs of face-painted fans to Queen's "We Will Rock You," and the familiar rock music draws us into the otherwise unfamiliar and far too distant world of the film. ACDC, Bachman-Turner Overdrive, Eric Clapton, Sly and the Family Stone, Thin Lizzy—all accompany and punctuate the storyline, and Helgeland clearly envisaged for the soundtrack a principal role. As in a memorable feast scene: minimal dialogue, and a medieval dance sequence that shifts smoothly into hilarious and prodigious disco choreographed to David Bowie's "Golden Years."

My one criticism is that Helgeland did not use enough music, and the tagline "he will rock you" ultimately left me wanting more. *A Knight's Tale* does not truly compare, for instance, to Baz Luhrmann's "spectacular spectacular" *Moulin Rouge*, released only weeks after Helgeland's film and—although admittedly a musical—making much more creative and effective use of modern music in a distant context.

Purists may balk at the title's allusion to a pilgrim's tale or to the portrait of a young "Geoff" Chaucer (Paul Bettany)—here divorced entirely from his long and illustrious career as a royal emissary and recast as a forger-poet with a gambling problem (to which he frequently

loses more than his shirt) and a gift for Marxist oratory. Yet Bettany's Chaucer, along with the soundtrack, steals the show. This is a simple movie, its beautiful young cast and little-engine-that-could message aimed at a teenaged audience. The music, however, as well as the playful anachronism and wit, have broader appeal, and this medievalist was delighted.

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