

# Allen's latest is a meditation on meaning and murder

Woody Allen has always been interested in man's search for meaning in life - a search he clearly sees as futile. Who can forget the young woman in "Play it Again, Sam," staring at a Jackson Pollock painting and seeing "the hideous lonely emptiness of existence, nothingness, the predicament of man forced to live in a barren, godless eternity"? That's not even the whole quote - but it could be Allen's mantra. The director has also mined the themes of crime and punishment, including murder - think "Crimes and Misdemeanors" and "Match Point." All these threads - plus, of course, love and seduction come together in his 45th feature, "Irrational Man," which may not be his very best recent work, but is by far not his worst, either.

As in so many Allen films, even if some parts don't gel, others do. If "Irrational Man" falls short of late-career home runs like "Midnight in Paris" and "Blue Jasmine," it also feels more fully realized than last year's visually gorgeous but otherwise uneven period piece, "Magic in the Moonlight." As always, the casting is something any director would kill for. Here, we have Joaquin Phoenix (grizzled, slightly pot-bellied) as an existentially challenged philosophy professor, Emma Stone (utterly effervescent) as his bright-eyed student, and Parker Posey (warmly kooky) as the sex-starved academic who forms the third side of this odd triangle.

The setting is Newport, Rhode Island, and that wind-swept, seaside town looks beautiful - no surprise, given the pedigree of cinematographer Darius Khondji. It's summer session at a small college, and Abe Lucas (Phoenix) arrives to teach philosophy. Accomplished and brilliant, he's also known for having affairs with students and swigging often from a flask in his pocket. "That should put some Viagra into the philosophy department," an observer says of his arrival. Abe is precisely the sort of disgruntled, unattainable intellectual that young women can't stay away from. That's what happens to Jill (Stone), who's beautiful, brilliant, kind and also an accomplished pianist (that last part may be overkill, but it's certainly not the film's most outlandish plot point). Bored with her clean-cut boyfriend, she finds herself drawn to her bad-boy professor, who's "so darned interesting and different."



In this image released by Sony Pictures Classics Emma Stone, left, and Joaquin Phoenix appear in a scene from 'Irrational Man.' — AP



Parker Posey, from left, Joaquin Phoenix and Emma Stone arrive at the Los Angeles Premiere of 'Irrational Man' held at the WGA Theatre. — AP

### Nihilistic tendencies

Meanwhile, frustrated wife Rita (Posey) has been dreaming of bedding Abe since before his arrival, and will NOT be denied. Yet Abe's long stretch of depression has left him with some issues in the sack. What's more, he's exhibiting disturbing nihilistic tendencies. At a party, he gets hold of the family gun and plays a game of real Russian Roulette, hoping to teach some sort of metaphysical lesson. Everything changes, though, when Abe and Jill overhear a conversation in a diner. A beleaguered mother is facing a court case that may cost her custody of her children; the judge is corrupt. If the bad judge

were out of the picture, Abe reasons, wouldn't the world be so much better? He immediately begins plotting a solution, and this dark quest fills him with a new zest for life.

Yes, it's a leap - but Allen's films are famous for such leaps (Time travel, anyone? People coming out of movie screens?) You either go with it or you don't. The same goes for Allen's breezy mix of light and dark tones. The subject may seem too dark for comedy, the treatment (and jazzy score) too light for tragedy. But the director balances it in his own way, and as always, we can take it or leave it.

To sell the film's escalating implausibility, of course, Allen needs strong and appealing performances. Luckily he has

them: Phoenix and Posey are pitch-perfect, and as for Stone, she's more watchable than ever. If life is indeed "a barren godless eternity," one could do worse than spend it with this beguiling actress. "Irrational Man," a Sony Pictures Classics release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America "for some language and sexual content." Running time: 94 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four. — AP



Australian musician Nick Cave posing on the red carpet for the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards at the Royal Opera House in London. — AFP

## Rock star Cave's son dies in cliff fall

The 15-year-old son of Australian rock icon Nick Cave has died after falling from a cliff in Brighton on the southern coast of England, police and the family said yesterday. "Our son Arthur died on Tuesday evening. He was our beautiful, happy loving boy," Cave and his wife, model Susie Bick, said in a statement issued by Sussex Police. "We ask that we be given the privacy our family needs to grieve at this difficult time." Police said that Arthur was found with life-threatening injuries at about 6:00 pm (1700 GMT) on Tuesday after having fallen from the cliffs.

"He died later that evening of his injuries in hospital. The death is not being treated as suspicious," a spokesman said. Nick Cave grew up in southeastern Australia but moved to London with his punk band The Birthday Party in 1980. He is best known for his work with the band Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds. The 57-year-old lives in Brighton, a liberal seaside town popular with artists and musicians. Arthur had a twin brother Earl. — AFP

## Judge cuts \$7.4 mln 'Blurred Lines' copyright award to Gaye family

A US judge on Tuesday cut a copyright infringement verdict by more than \$2 million against recording stars Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams over their 2013 smash hit "Blurred Lines," but offered Marvin Gaye's heirs a 50 percent royalty on future earnings from the song. A federal jury in Los Angeles had sided with Gaye's estate in March, finding that parts of his 1977 hit "Got to Give it Up" were copied by Thicke and Williams for their R&B chart-topper. The jury awarded \$7.4 million in damages and profits. The case has transfixed the music world because it raised questions as to when a song can be considered plagiarized and when it merely serves as inspiration. US District Judge John Kronstadt in Los Angeles said on Tuesday the amount was "excessive," based on the evidence presented in the case. He pared back the total to \$5.3 million. Kronstadt denied a bid by Gaye's heirs to stop distribution of "Blurred Lines," instead ordering they be paid an ongoing 50 percent royalty of the song's revenues.

Though the jury had cleared rapper T.I. in the case, even though he had contributed to the song, Kronstadt ruled on Tuesday that he was also liable for infringement. The lawyer for Gaye's heirs, Richard Busch, said in a statement the family was thrilled with most of the decision but is reviewing its options on the judge's trimming of damages.

"The Gaye family was protecting the legacy of their father/husband and I could not be happier for them," he said. An attorney for Thicke and Williams could not immediately be reached. Williams acknowledged in court he had been a fan of Gaye's music since childhood, but said "Blurred Lines" and "Got to Give it Up" were similar in genre only. The suit cited magazine interviews given by Thicke in which he admitted drawing on Gaye's song when producing and recording his own song. — Reuters

## Home for retired musicians raises funds to buy Verdi letters

A home for retired musicians created by composer Giuseppe Verdi has secured a cache of his joking and sometimes off-color correspondence with an Italian count for the bargain price of 120,000 euros (\$132,000). Officials said yesterday that the 82 letters failed to sell at auction last year, despite international interest, due to restrictions by the Culture Ministry that the buyer must be an Italian resident. That excluded the many foreign universities that expressed interest.

The home for retired musicians jumped at the opportunity, negotiating the price down from the 150,000-euro original starting bid, and securing donors through an Italian crowd sourcing site. The head of the home said the money transfer has been made, but the letters won't be delivered until the sale is formally approved by culture officials. — AP



A painting showing the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi is displayed at the Casa Verdi, in Milan, Italy yesterday. — AP



One Direction members Louis Tomlinson, left, and Zayn Malik during an event for their film 'One Direction: This Is Us,' in Makuhari, near Tokyo. — AP

## One Direction's Louis Tomlinson to be father

One Direction heartthrob Louis Tomlinson is set to become a father, reports said Tuesday, in the latest jolt for the boy band once known for its squeaky-clean image. The 23-year-old, who would be the first dad in One Direction, is expecting a child with Los Angeles stylist Briana Jungwirth, according to British tabloid The Sun and US celebrity magazine People. The Sun - which ran the headline "One Conception" - said that Tomlinson went on dates with Jungwirth in May after breaking up with girlfriend of four years Eleanor Calder. People magazine said that Tomlinson - whose British band has vowed not to split up after a recent feud - was looking for properties in Los Angeles. "They are both really happy and although they aren't in a relationship, their friendship is extremely strong and they are both really excited about the baby," an anonymous friend was quoted as saying. A

representative for the band did not immediately comment. Tomlinson last posted on Twitter a day earlier to raise support for a children's charity. One Direction stormed onto the scene in 2010 when the young men appeared on the British talent show "The X Factor."

Beginning in 2011, the group has released an album of crowd-pleasing pop each year before the year-end holidays, selling more than 50 million records worldwide. One Direction largely managed to avoid controversy until March when founding member Zayn Malik quit. Malik afterward entered a feud over social media with Tomlinson, who questioned his former bandmate's solo efforts. — AFP

## Songster Joe Jackson to explore four cities in new album

British-born musician Joe Jackson on Tuesday announced a new album recorded in four cities, in the latest musical exploration for the eclectic artist. The songwriter, a longtime resident of New York who has touched on jazz, pop and classical over his more than 35-year career, said that his first album since 2012 will come out on October 2. Entitled "Fast Forward," the album features four-song sets from four cities New York, Amsterdam, Berlin and New Orleans.

The Amsterdam session involves the most diverse instrumentation, including appearances by the Concertgebouw Orchestra and the 14-year-old Broadway singer Mitchell Sink. Songs on the album include, from New York, a cover of the 1970s rocker group Television's "See No Evil" track, and in Berlin, a modern take on a 1930s cabaret song. The New Orleans set features all local musicians from the birthplace of jazz.

Jackson, who has spent much of his time in Berlin in recent years, is widely known for his 1979 hit "Is She Really Going Out With Him?" His last album, "The Duke," went to number one on the US Billboard jazz chart and his 2000 "Symphony No. 1" won the Grammy for Best Pop Instrumental Album. — AFP



## Box Office: 'Ant-Man' to tower over 'Trainwreck'

The Marvel name is golden. It has the ability to lift up marginal superheroes to the ranks of Iron Man, Thor and Captain America. Witness "Ant-Man," the latest costumed avenger to hit movie screens. Though hardly a household name, the man with the powers of an arthropod should show some box office heft when the adventure film that sports his name debuts to \$62 million this weekend. That's roughly in line with what "Captain America: The First Avenger" and "Thor" did in their initial weekends in theaters, even though "Ant-Man"

is a lesser star in the Marvel universe.

"The Marvel brand is strong enough to bring a familiarity to any movie they shepherd to the marketplace," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst at Rentrak. "It carries weight with an audience. It acts like a sequel would and makes audiences feel more comfortable." "Ant-Man" rolls out in 3,800 locations, most of which are in 3D. There will also be 361 Imax and 388 premium large format screenings, giving "Ant-Man" some sizable surcharges.

Paul Rudd, Michael Douglas and Corey Stoll star in the comic book adaptation, which centers on a down-on-his-luck thief who rediscovers his moral compass after using technology to transform himself into the size of an insect. You know, that old story. Critics have liked the movie, hailing its witty tone and comparing it to "Guardians of the Galaxy," which mixed humor with action. — Reuters