

My Lifetime Passes

by Joe Mulder

Earlier this week, PoopReading.com's own Brandon Kruse linked to what I thought was an incredibly interesting article from "The Onion AV Club" regarding the concept of the "lifetime pass." This was a concept I'd bandied about myself a time or two with friends, but had never considered writing about (and what a shame). The idea is easy enough: simply put, which artists (actors, musicians, directors, comedians, etc.) have done such good work in the past that you will continue to support their efforts no matter what (i.e., no matter how bad their work becomes, assuming it becomes bad at all. Nothing says it has to)?

It was a very interesting piece, with responses ranging from "Mr. Show's" David Cross and Bob Odenkirk to the Albert Brooks to Dave Matthews Band (quick tangent for a Dave Matthews Band story: at my cousin Adam's wedding, his brother Chad used part of his toast as an opportunity to list some of the endearing malapropisms that Adam's beautiful bride Megan had spoken over the years. One could be forgiven for assuming that Chad was exaggerating for comedic effect, but the very next day, at a brunch that Adam's parents hosted for the newlyweds, Megan was heard to remark that a particular guest "looked like the lead singer of the Dave Matthews Band").

And, of course, it got me thinking: who has a lifetime pass from me? Anyone?

As it turns out, four people do.

Lifetime Pass #1: Kevin Smith

I still enjoy Kevin Smith immensely as a personality, even if I don't enjoy his movies quite as much as I did when I was in college. I've met him twice (although really, if you're a Kevin Smith fan and you haven't met him by now, it would almost have to be because you're avoiding him on purpose) and he is in person just how one might imagine he'd be based on his appearances on talk shows and in DVD commentaries: an extremely affable, friendly man who seems to know that he (like any celebrity) hit the show biz lottery, and is eternally and uniquely grateful to be making a living in the entertainment industry.

It all started with *Clerks*, of course, which, when I was a senior in high school, was just about the most unbelievable thing my friends and I had ever seen. Being my school's movie-nerd-in-residence, I exposed everyone I could to *Clerks*, hosting viewing parties in the family basement that were attended by people I never would have imagined I'd socialize with (or want to socialize with, for that matter). But *Clerks* brought us together in harmony. So thanks for that, Kevin Smith.

Mallrats wasn't the greatest movie ever made, to be sure, but I still had a great deal of fun driving with a couple of friends up to the mall in Eden Prairie, Minnesota (where the bulk of "Mallrats" was filmed) to see it on opening weekend. I can't rightly claim that we were disappointed, and I've had no problem watching the movie a couple times again since then.

Then came *Chasing Amy*, still a favorite of mine. A particular fondness for *Chasing Amy* was one of the first things my wife and I ever discussed the very day we met, in fact. We even went onto name our cat after Jason Lee's character in the movie, an appallingly cutesy move mitigated slightly by the fact that Kevin Smith himself has said that he named his dogs "Mulder" and "Scully."

I also enjoyed *Dogma*, which hit theaters ten years ago. And since then, whether it's because I've grown up a bit or because Kevin Smith's movies have gotten a bit worse, he hasn't really done anything I've particularly liked. *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* proved surprisingly rewatchable on premium cable, and the initial love scene between the two principles in *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* was really done as well as any love scene in any romantic comedy, but other than that there hasn't been a great deal to love in the last decade or so.

And, to a certain extent, I don't even care. Kevin Smith built up such a reservoir of goodwill with me as a moviegoer that even though it's been ten years since he put out a movie I really, really liked (though I did like *Zack and Miri* some, and seeing as how that is his most recent movie I think there's cause to be optimistic), I haven't missed seeing one in the theater since *Clerks*, which, in my defense, never came to a theater within 100 miles of where I lived. And, now that I think of it, my wife and I even caught a 10th anniversary screening of it in a theater in Los Angeles a while back. So there.

Long story short: Kevin Smith has directed two feature films since my wife and I started having kids and, even though neither one of us has been blown away by his stuff lately, we still made a point of getting a babysitter and going out to make sure we saw both movies in the theater.

And that, my friends, is exactly what is meant by the term "lifetime pass."

Lifetime Pass #2: Joss Whedon

I'm a couple of episodes behind, but I'm still slogging my way through FOX's "Dollhouse." If that doesn't say "lifetime pass," I don't know what does.

Joss Whedon, for those who don't know, created the television shows "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," "Angel" and

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"Firefly," wrote and directed the "Firefly"-based feature film *Serenity*, was nominated for an Oscar as part of the team that wrote *Toy Story* and, though he didn't receive a screenwriter credit on the film, reportedly wrote most of *Speed*, which is probably why a movie that was essentially a low-rent *Die Hard On a Bus* became one of the surprise action hits of the '90s. Whedon also gave us "Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog" during the writers strike, just to prove that he could.

Enough has been written about "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" by people geekier and more obsessed with the show than I, so I won't go over it all again. It's one of the best two or three shows in the history of television, is all that needs to be reiterated. "Angel," its spinoff, was an underrated gem, and "Firefly" really should have become as big as *Star Wars* and run as long as "Bonanza." It was that good.

So, yes, those "Dollhouse" episodes that I've got on my DVR at home will stay there until I sit through every last minute of them, and I'll be sure to choke down any additional episodes that show up as well. Because after all Joss Whedon's done for me, that's the least I can do for him.

Lifetime Pass #3: Sarah Silverman

Her stuff has gotten a bit to *avant-garde* for my tastes lately, but she long since earned a lifetime pass just for two "Conan" appearances she made in the late '90s that I recorded and kept and that my friends and I studied as though we were preparing to play her in the Super Bowl. I'd seen her do stand-up on various shows since she'd left "Saturday Night Live" in 1993, and I'd always made it a point to watch her because I found her both sexy and hilarious (I understand that "I find Sarah Silverman to be both sexy and hilarious" isn't a groundbreaking statement these days, but back in 1995 there weren't a lot of people sitting next to me on that bandwagon). So when I sat down to watch "Conan" and saw that she was coming on, I fired up the VCR (remember VCRs?). Her material might not survive the transition to the written word completely intact, but suffice it to say that the first of her appearances that I had on tape ended with Conan O'Brien laughing uncontrollably into his sleeve before throwing it to commercial, and the second ended with sidekick Andy Richter literally burying his head in his hand and saying, "Oh, my God," while Conan claimed that "I'm not here anymore."

That was enough; she's got a lifetime pass.

Lifetime Pass #4: Norm Macdonald

This is an easy one to honor, because Norm Macdonald doesn't really do anything anymore. Sure, once in a while he'll show up on a radio show and help the host deconstruct

the Kenny Rogers song "Coward of the County," just to remind you that he's still the funniest person in the world. Beyond that, I think he just sits around playing poker and doing the occasional stand-up gig to pay the rent. Let me tell you: carving out an hour a week for "Dollhouse" is not always the easiest thing to do; all lifetime passers should make things as easy on us as Norm Macdonald does.
