

ARTS



Matt Damon plays the indestructible Jason Bourne. The third instalment in the Bourne series, 'The Bourne Ultimatum', mainly consists of chase scenes

Don't pretend it's not silly, Matt



The Bourne Ultimatum

CERT 12A, 111 MINS

“W...surveillance nightmare. It's one of the busiest rail terminals in the world.” Ah, pity the poor actor who was given this unnecessary piece of exposé as his only line in the movie. And yet, he could have done worse.

On the list of silly lines in *The Bourne Ultimatum*, this isn't even in the top 10. What about the CIA director, who, having nearly summed up the plot of the last two movies of the Bourne franchise, concludes with a straight face: “You couldn't make it up?” Or what about Bourne himself, shouting down the telephone at a journalist who is researching his story: “Listen. This isn't some story in the newspaper. This is real?”

Oh no it's not! What struck me about *The Bourne Ultimatum*, the third instalment in the adventures of amnesiac CIA killer Jason Bourne, is just how

self-referential and exaggerated it has already become. When *The Bourne Identity* came out in 2002, it was a revelation: serious, psychological, packed with first-class chase scenes and filmed with a shaky-camera realism, it defined the modern action movie. Only five years later it has spawned so many copycat films (among them the television series *24* and the latest Bond movie) that it has become an established genre, the latest film takes so much for granted that parts of it feel like a comedy Bourne send-up on *Saturday Night Live*. It is über-Bourne, a distilled shot of Bourne espresso.

To start with, there is almost no plot. Jason Bourne (Matt Damon), the one-time CIA assassin who has lost his memory, is still on a mission to find out who he really is. In the first movie he discovered that he was part of a secret CIA black-ops unit called Treadstone, and he went to live in the Caribbean with his German girlfriend; in the second movie the CIA killed his girlfriend, so he exacted revenge by blowing the cover on Treadstone and getting the CIA high command into trouble.

What is required for the third movie is not so much a plot as just a set-up accordingly, it emerges that there was an even more covert operation called Blackbriar, which involved traumatising agents to make them tougher “assets”, and that Jason was a guinea pig in the programme; what's more, a journalist at the *Guardian* has discovered too much and the new evil guys at the CIA want to kill the lot of them. The rest, as they don't say often

enough, is chase scenes. I reckon that about one hour – that is, over half the total running time – of this film consists of wordless, grunting, high-speed chase scenes. London, New York, Tangiers, Madrid – Bourne is the ultimate tourist, magicking himself to a new city every time he discovers a connection, however vague, to his own forgotten life story. And every time he gets there, as if he has pre-ordered the thrill, someone is ready to chase him, usually at the train station. The shaky, fast-paced style of these scenes has now become so

Your fun half will find it highly accomplished; your pompous half will find it meaningless

extreme that by the end of them you are exhausted; you squint your eyes and try to follow, as each shot lasts no longer than a second or two, and the camera never, ever, stays still. Your fun half will find it highly accomplished, pacy cinema; your pompous half will find it meaningless montage designed for the impatience of the YouTube generation.

At the London premiere Matt Damon took a pop at James Bond: “Bond is an imperialist and a misogynist who kills people and laughs about it, drinks martinis and cracks jokes. Bourne is a serial monogamist whose girlfriend is dead and who does nothing but think about her.” Well, first, I know which

one sounds more fun out of those two. Second, Bond sadly no longer cracks jokes, in part thanks to Bourne. And third, as it happens, Bourne is just as sexist as Bond: the girl CIA agent is totally useless and constantly needs to be rescued, and the only female CIA chief, Pamela Landy (Joan Allen), is cast as the softy who feels sorry for Jason and is outmanoeuvred by her male colleagues.

It may be frightfully serious, but let's not pretend. Matt, that there is nothing ridiculous about Bourne. Each time the films get more intense, they become commensurately more silly. For starters, the hero is indestructible, and knows it, since he voluntarily crashes his car and dives into exploding bombs. The bad guys have also become more pastiche and eccentric. *The Bourne Ultimatum* offers the trigger-happy, nervous CIA chief (David Strathairn) – staple fare for the genre – but this time he is an apparently motiveless crackpot crying “take him out!” and “take her out!” like he's following a football game. As for Dr Albert Hirsch (Robert Finney), the bespectacled doctor with the German name who masterminded the Blackbriar programme, he is a more retro, more outrageously Bond-esque villain than the new Bond would ever allow.

The Bourne Ultimatum feels like a celebration of how brilliant the Bourne films are, without offering new substance. It is watchable but self-indulgent; it takes itself seriously without being remotely serious.

Roman epic draws giggles, not gasps

BALLET REVIEW
Dennis Chang

Bolshoi Ballet
LONDON COLISEUM

While queuing to pick up my tickets for the Bolshoi Ballet's season at the London Coliseum, two perfectly coiffured ladies behind me struck up an animated discussion about the differences between the Bolshoi and the Kirov, the two grand dames of Russian ballet. “You see, the Kirov has got the artistry. The Bolshoi, on the other hand, is known for vulgar display – and sometimes artistry.” Not entirely fair, as I have seen plenty of gratuitously played legs and pumped

sympathies. *Spartacus* was a revolutionary ballet at its premiere. Its epic scope, angst-ridden “monologues” and daring battle and bacchanal scenes were all major departures from the Tchaikovsky classics that would have been the mainstay of the Moscowville ballet diet.

It was created in 1908, Grigoriev's once jaw-dropping crowd scenes no longer draw gasps. The Roman courtiers' tunics are as hopelessly unsexy as the gladiators' plasticky weapons look unthreatening. Aram Khachaturian's waltz-bang score centred to a 1960s Palladium variety show atmosphere. It was impossible to suppress giggles when, in an orgy scene, a row of girls opened and closed their legs to the um-pah rhythm of the music à la synchronised swimming.

It was a cherry on top of all this so-bad-it's-marvellous nonsense was Carlos Acosta guesting in the title role as head slave. Royal Ballet principals have never picked the Cuban star's way with Ashton and MacMillan, but in this ballet, where subtlety gets in the way, Acosta found the perfect arena to display his arsenal of weaponry. Forever charging across from one corner of the stage to the other, Acosta was breathtaking in the sheer amplitude of each move. More remarkable still, in the headiest moments of virtuosic

display, he still managed to maintain a certain English discipline.

Not to be outdone by the Anglo-Cuban firebrand, the Russians laid on two young stars – the 21-year-old Natalia Osipova and 19-year-old Ivan Vasiliev – for the opening night of *Don Quixote*. Barely out of the corp de ballet, their performance outshone their more senior stable mates. While Vasiliev fits into the short, dynamic, Wayne Sleep mode, Osipova is altogether more difficult to categorise. Her rise to prominence signifies a return to the short petite type, after two generations of long-legged Amazonian primas favoured by the Bolshoi administration. Despite her height, Osipova has the proportions of a tall dancer – ie legs that can be raised past her ears. Unusually for a Russian ballerina she is a virtuoso turner, and has a leap that seems to hang in mid-air. In this faux-Spanish romp of a ballet, Osipova's Kiri tore through Marius Petipa's tricky steps like a bear on the scene red, flinging herself into her opening diagonal – step, step, kick, run, run, then an enormous leap to the top in which her head nearly touched her back leg. In a blink she had bisected the busy Spanish market, triumphantly emerging, seemingly unaware she was one pace from topping into the orchestra.

A slightly different sort of hazard confronted Maria Alexandrova on the second night of the Bolshoi's *Le Corsaire*, a riotous 19th-century ballet about pirates, abductions, and jealous harem slave girls. At the heart of the impossibly fanciful scenario is *Le jardin animé*, an elaborate set of classical dances disguised as a wedding celebration for the lascivious Pasha and Medora, his latest acquisition. Like petals of a chrysanthemum flower, row after row of girls in white tutus swarmed on to the stage, with Alexandrova's Medora trisecting the centre. Bewildered women arrived with garlands, which they left on the floor; men also brought on what looked like rectangular pieces of turf. Then, the unthinkable: a solo dance for Medora in the midst of all this clutter. Despite having her eyes fixed on the traps all around, Alexandrova didn't avoid eliciting alarmed stage whippers when she backed into, and nearly fell on top of, her smily chorus girls.

The ever popular *Corsaire* pas de deux was danced with aplomb. Alexandrova conquered the choreography's legendary difficulties without once departing from her character. In contrast, Nikolai Tsiskaridze's pirate Conny was never in character. He had both eyes firmly on the audience, and a big smirk on his face that suggested he found the proceedings as ludicrous as we did. Nevertheless, he was a magnetic presence. The usually adriatic-drenched solo took on an aristocratic elegance, and each leap and turn in the air remained suitably grand – suitably bolshoi.

Traditional Priests' Support Trust (TPST)

We offer financial support, in confidence, to individual Roman Catholic priests, clergy and religious resident in the UK, who are in need and who are exclusively committed to the traditional (Old Rite) liturgy and discipline of the Church.

We are traditional laity and the trust has charitable status. Its establishment has been welcomed by traditional priests.

To donate to the trust, receive more information or apply for support, please contact:

Mr David Forster
22 Tennyson Drive, Abingdon,
Oxon OX14 5PD
Telephone: 01235 550551
email: DF77777@aol.com
or visit www.traditional-priests.org.uk

Poetry in the sauerkraut

THEATRE REVIEW

Carmen Jones

FESTIVAL HALL, LONDON

For the inaugural production of the renovated Festival Hall, artistic director Jude Kelly has chosen Oscar Hammerstein's 1953 musical, which updates Bizet's opera to World War Two and relocates it in America's Deep South. Though there was a film version in 1954 with Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte, the actual stage show wasn't seen in London until 1991. Carmen works in a parachute factory; José is a GI called Joe; Escamillo is no longer a toreador, but a prizefighter called Husky Miller.

The Festival Hall has never been a good venue for stage shows. The London Philharmonic and Philharmonics alternate performances. The orchestra, dead centre on the stage and dressed in holiday gear, is very distracting. The action takes place behind them, to the side of them and in front on a catwalk. Kelly's production is so busy that it is often difficult to know where to look. The chorus, led loose, runs about all over the place, constantly upstaging the leads while they are singing.

Mezzo-soprano Tsakane Valentine Maswanganyi as Carmen strides the catwalk in a slashed red dress. Slim and leggy, she behaves like a fashion model. In the final scene, mimed boxing goes

on in slow motion behind the lovers so that the audiences can actually see the knockout punch and the murder happening simultaneously. Brothers Andrew and Rodney Clarke are honest Joe and macho Husky. Sherry Boone is the nice girl Joe ditches and her singing of “My Joe” is one of the evening's high spots. The other show-stopper is Brenda Edwards’ “Beating out dat rhythm on a drum”. *Carmen Jones* is an excellent showcase for an all-black cast, but, unfortunately, Hammerstein's vernacular lyrics are totally inaudible.

Elling

TRAFALGAR STUDIOS

In the 18th century in England the public in search of entertainment would go to Bedlam and observe the lunatics. In France the public would go to Charenton and see the inmates acting in productions written and staged by the Marquis de Sade. In the 20th century theatregoers and cinematographers would watch actors of the calibre of Jack Nicholson, Dustin Hoffman, Jimi Mils, Ralph Richardson and John Gielgud pretending to be mentally degraded individuals in the certain knowledge that such roles were the quickest and surest route to winning an Oscar.

Elling, a Norwegian novel by Ingvar Ambjørnsen, was turned into a play and then into a film which went on to win an Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film in

2002. It arrives in London in an adaptation by Simon Bent, who, not knowing any Norwegian, worked from the film and the subtitles. The play, which is an excellent career move for John Simm, who is best known to television audiences for his performance in *Dr Who* and *Life on Mars*.

Two middle-aged men are let out of an asylum and placed in a state-sponsored flat in Oslo so that the social services can see if they can survive in a normal everyday environment. Elling (Simm), a timid, neurotic, fastidious mummy's boy who hasn't got over his mother's death, is given to hiding in cupboards. He scuttles around the flat, unable to go out and unwilling to answer the phone. “Maybe,” he says, “I don't belong in the real world.” Kjell (the engaging Adrian Bower) is a hulking slob who likes food and is obsessed with sex. “There's nothing wrong with me,” he says. “I'm just a bit funny.” Together the odd couple – short and tall, introvert and extrovert, brains and brawn – are a classic comic double act. A pregnant woman living in the flat above, instantly falls in love with Kjell. Meanwhile, Elling starts writing poetry and puts copies of his poems in packets of Quaker which he leaves in supermarkets.

The play, episode, series, mental and never judgmental, traces their gradual rehabilitation.

Robert Titch



Shaped by the past, creating the future

The Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University

in association with

Ushaw College, the RC seminary for the north of England is pleased to announce the opportunity to specialise in

Catholic Studies

within the Department's MA in Christian Theology

(12 months full-time / 24 months part-time)

Relevant modules include:

Conceiving Change in Contemporary Catholicism

Dr Paul D. Murray

Ressourcement Theology: The Catholic Critique of Culture

Dr Marcus Pound

Principles of Theological Ethics

Dr Chris Insole

Christian Gender

Prof. Gerard Loughlin

Durham University's Department of Theology and Religion, internationally renowned as a centre for research, is committed to academic excellence and to collaborative working in ecumenical partnerships. The Department stands next to Durham Cathedral, home to the shrines of Saints Cuthbert and Bede the Venerable, and – with Durham Castle – part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site of immense beauty.

Ushaw College was founded in Douai (now in North East France) in 1668 and has occupied its present site, three miles west of Durham city, since 1808. The College houses St Cuthbert's Seminary, which trains Catholic priests for England's northern dioceses and offers an educational outreach programme for lay and ordained people. Ushaw works in close ecumenical partnership with Cranmer Hall (Church of England) and the Wesley Study Centre, both located within St. John's College, Durham.

In addition to the MA in Christian Theology, the Department of Theology and Religion also offers the following postgraduate degrees: MA in Biblical Studies; MA in Religion and Society; MA by thesis; M.Lit.; D.Min.; PhD.

For further details about the Catholic Studies pathway or about any of the other aforementioned programmes, please visit our web-site or contact:

Mrs Ellen Middleton, Postgraduate Administration, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, Abbey House, Palace Green, Durham, DH1 3RS, UK. +44 (0)191 334 3956 | ellen.middleton@durham.ac.uk

www.durham.ac.uk/theology/religion