

Interview: Michael Cera, Edgar Wright Take on 'Scott Pilgrim vs. the World'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 11, 2010 - 3:11pm

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CHICAGO – With beloved films like “Superbad,” “Hot Fuzz,” and “Shaun of the Dead” (never mind the greatness of TV shows “Arrested Development” and “Spaced”), Edgar Wright and Michael Cera have nothing more to prove to their loyal fans. So, while this weekend’s “Scott Pilgrim vs. the World” has been building deafening buzz and they’d love for it to breakthrough to the masses, one gets the impression after talking to them that they’re more concerned about satisfying those who know and already love them and Brian Lee O’Malley’s beloved comic book on which their new film is based.

Of course, it all starts with the book. “I think that when you read it, you feel so connected to it,” says Michael Cera. “It feels so personal. It feels like you know [Writer] Brian [Lee O’Malley]. He captures something so well. They’re so engaging. You connect to it instantly and you’re right in it right away.”



Edgar Wright, Michael Cera

Photo credit: Joe Arce

The film stars Cera as Scott Pilgrim, a relatively selfish and insecure young man who plays in a struggling band and happens to be dating a girl still in high school. Life’s not great. When Ramona Flowers (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) stumbles into his life, he finally finds something worth fighting for. And that’s exactly what he has to do as he’s forced to face off against Ramona’s “seven evil exes” (including Chris Evans,

Brandon Routh, and Jason Schwartzman). The hybrid of comic book art, pop culture, video games, music, comedy, and action is unlike anything you’ve seen in a long time. And the lucky viewers at Comic-Con who notoriously adored the film would agree.



Michael Cera

Photo credit: Universal

Edgar Wright goes into more detail about the experience — “It was really nice. Some people in the press have sort of said that it was like fanning the flames, preaching to the converted, but if they didn’t like it, we would have heard equally audible boos. Like you said, the fans of the book hold it very dear to them. So, for the fans that really loved it: That meant so much. In some respects, if you think about that, it was our toughest audience. But it played like a rock concert. It was amazing. Shaun of the Dead I showed at Comic-Con and it was easily the best screening of that I’ve ever attended and this was one louder. It was amazing. It actually got better the second night. Somehow, the audience who had been lining up all day just went bananas. I was overwhelmed and when I went up at the end to thank them I actually teared up.”

“Scott Pilgrim vs. the World” captures a time in a young man’s life in which he finally starts to move on from the apathy of youth. Like so many of us, he has a number of people around him — including Anna Kendrick, Kieran Culkin, and Alison Pill — but still seems alone and lost. Wright says, “It really captures that time in your life when you have a big group of friends who stay together even though some people don’t really like each other. Or have grown apart from each other. When you come out of school, you hang with a large crowd and when you get older people split off. What’s nice about this is that you have a lead character who is a daydreamer in his own universe but even given that he still has a Greek chorus of people who tell him what he should do. He doesn’t really listen to them that much.”



Edgar Wright

Photo credit: Universal

One of the more essential arcs of the film is that "...people are telling him what he OUGHT to do and at the end of the film he does something that he WANTS to do," says Wright. "You know, that's the FIRST time that I've actually managed to...I wish I had come up with that at the pitch meeting. It would have been easier to make. (*Laughs.*)"

Considering the video game aesthetic of the film, people are constantly asking Edgar how non-gamers will respond. The irony is that Edgar himself is a non-gamer. "I'm a lapsed gamer in that I haven't had a console in like ten years. Since "Spaced." That's the last time I heavily played video games. If anything, the vernacular, iconography, and structure of the video game elements are from the late '70s and early '80s. It's that old. And these things have been with us for decades now. In terms of comics, what I loved about Brian's artwork is that I grew up with...I didn't get into anime until "Akira" came out but my first experience with Japanimation was "Battle of the Planets." I used to watch that show and know that there was something cool about it but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. Now I can look back on it and see. A lot of Japanese animation is almost equivalent to Spaghetti Westerns in that they don't have the same resources as the States and so they compensate by making everything look really stylish."

A lot of the "Scott Pilgrim" experience is in the quick-cut editing, nostalgic effects, and pop-art visuals. Considering how much would be developed in post-production, Wright stayed very communicative on-set. "As we were shooting, I would see cut footage," Michael says. "While we were shooting, I got a sense of how shots were being cut together and transitions. He showed us stuff constantly including tests of animation, effects, music. Anything he had, he would show us usually, which is really useful. It's helpful. It gives it a sense of realization when everyone is going through the same thing."

For the action scenes, which Michael explains are all "me or some acrobatic stunt man," Wright avoided too much green-screen or CGI. He explains, "I find it amusing that even people who've seen the film think most of it is green screen because of the style and I'm like you saw that those were real sets, right? We tried to steer away from that because with a couple of exceptions – "Sin City" and "300" – I don't really care for a lot of green screen films. And because the material is SO outlandish anyway, I wanted the actors to literally have their feet on the ground."



Michael Cera, Edgar Wright, Mark Webber
Photo credit: Universal

"We were already doing R&D and testing when I saw "Speed Racer" and I like parts of "Speed Racer." Some of it is quite hypnotic but what's weird is that when you're in an apartment or someone's house – that is ALSO green-screened. I felt that with the "Star Wars" pictures as well. Wouldn't it be cheaper to just build a set? It feels like a false economy. To green-screen Scott Pilgrim's apartment?"

When it comes to bringing real-life personal relationships to play in the arc of Scott, Cera says, "It's hard because it's so extreme. The tone is really big. You kind of just have to capture what the graphic novels do so well."

And what they do so well is best captured in Wright's explanation of the frenetic pace of his film. "...you're asking the audience to kind of keep up. We don't slow down. We don't talk down. That's my main thing. And I feel like that's something that comedies used to do like in '30s screwball comedies. They went at it like a machine-gun pace. Anything from Marx Brothers to Bugs Bunny...as a kid, I used to watch Bugs Bunny and not understand all the jokes but I LOVED it."

"Scott Pilgrim vs. the World" stars Michael Cera, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Alison Pill, Mark Webber, Johnny Simmons, Ellen Wong, Kieran Culkin, Anna Kendrick, Aubrey Plaza, Chris Evans, Brandon Routh, Mae Whitman, and Jason Schwartzman. It was written by Michael Bacall & Edgar Wright and directed by Wright and is rated PG-13. It opens this Friday, August 13th, 2010.



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