



Publicity still from *Almost Famous*.

Almost Famous Review by Megan Spencer

If you've ever loved music, specifically rock, then you will love Cameron Crowe's fourth outing as a writer/director, *Almost Famous*.

For all its good humour and bad flares this isn't *Spinal Tap* (1984), nor does it go down the well-worn slacker track of

Dazed and Confused (1993). *Almost Famous* is an affectionately wrought, multi-layered character piece based on Crowe's own 70s teen journey into rock writing and adulthood.

In his first film role Patrick Fugit plays Cameron Crowe's alter ego, William Miller. William is a wide-eyed 15 year-old observer who somehow wangles his way into backstage nirvana on behalf of Rolling Stone magazine. He hooks up with the politely termed "Band Aids" (read groupies) and almost famous band Stillwater, accompanying them all on a cross-country tour while his worried, whip-smart mum (*Fargo*'s Frances McDormand) agonises over her realisation: "rock stars have kidnapped my son".

Along the way William discovers there's more to rock journalism than just banging out a thousand words and being "cool". Philip Seymour Hoffman (*Happiness*, *Boogie Nights*) is William's (and the film's) conscience, playing real life rock critic Lester Bangs with the nuance and authenticity we've come to expect from this astounding actor. He gets some of the film's best lines, of which there are many throughout.

The beauty of *Almost Famous* - and many-a Cameron Crowe film for that matter - is that he writes dialogue 'to die for', killer scenes and achieving genuine intimacy and warmth without copping to simpleminded feelgood fare. He also gets great performances from his actors: Fugit's portrayal of William being one, revealing an emotional maturity way beyond the actor's tender years.

Some *have* attacked the film for glossing over the less flattering, grungier aspects of a rock life on the road. I doubt that Crowe would censor "realism" for any reasons of politeness or a 'family friendly' rating. Rather I'd suggest his priority was creating believable and intimate scenes of human exchange between the film's key players, which for the most part are seen subjectively through the eyes of a fifteen year-old boy.

Almost Famous is comparable to other celluloid "love letters" to pop culture; last year's top-five-athon *High Fidelity*, the comic-obsessed *Chasing Amy*, even *Angst*, an Australian movie which overflowed with not only references to, but a deep affection for, horror movies.

In this instance *Almost Famous* vibrates with the spirit of music, its script also revealing a deep understanding of what it means to be a "fan".

Anyone who has written the name of their favourite band on a denim pencil case, over and over, in blue biro, will understand where *Almost Famous* is coming from.

Visit *Almost Famous* on Cameron Crowe's [website](#).

