



At the movies



Eight talented performers comprise the cast of "The Big Chill," directed by Lawrence Kasdan.

'Big Chill' is warming film



If you only see one movie a year, make sure this year's is "The Big Chill." The New York City Film Festival chose it as one of its feature films this fall, and Eugene is lucky to have it here before 1984.

"The Big Chill" is a movie that can't be categorized. It's billed as a comedy, and it's funny, very funny, but it's not just a comedy. It involves love but it's not exactly a romance. It has a message, but the movie is more than just a vehicle for the message. It's safest to just call it a lot of fun with a lot of clout.

Written by Lawrence Kasdan ("Body Heat") and Barbara Benedek, and directed by Kasdan, the movie brings together a group of close college friends when Alex, one of the group, commits suicide.

The cast is uniformly excellent. William Hurt ("Altered States," "Body Heat") turns in a good performance as Nick, a Vietnam veteran who worked as a radio psychologist for KSFO, a Bay Area radio station, and is now in "sales." In many respects the movie pivots around him.

But that's not fair to the rest of the characters. It would be better to say the movie's focus swings from one character to the next. Jeff Goldblum ("Annie Hall") plays Michael, a very jaded and cynical journalist for People magazine. Out for sex and admitting it, Michael delivers some of the funniest lines in the movie. "The longest story (in People magazine) has to be short enough so the average reader can finish it in the time it takes for the average crap."

Tom Berenger ("Looking for Mr. Goodbar", "Butch and Sundance: The Early Days") plays Sam, star of a private detective television series strongly similar to "Magnum, P.I." But Sam is no mere tough guy and shows much sensitivity in his hurt and confusion over the suicide of his old friend.

Glenn Close ("The World According to Garp") and Kevin Kline ("Sophie's Choice") play Sarah and Michael, the owners of the house where everyone spends the weekend. Their marriage has weathered well; both Close and Kline do an admirable job of creating a believable and tender relationship on the screen.

One whose marriage hasn't done as well is Karen, played by JoBeth Williams. She gave up her writing to get married and have children, and now finds herself stuck — and disappointed. Meg (Mary Kay Place) has just the opposite problem. She's never married and now wants children. She decides to have a child anyway, and picks this weekend as the time to start and one of the four men as the father.

Meg Tilly ("Psycho II") plays Chloe, Alex's somewhat spacey girlfriend. She finds herself in the uncomfortable situation of spending time with a group to which she really doesn't belong, and which comes, in fact, from another generation.

Director Kasdan uses some interesting techniques. In order, for instance, to provide background information on the characters, they are shown interviewing themselves on Sarah and Michael's home movie camera.

"The Big Chill" is rated R and is showing at National Theater.
Frank Shaw

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