

Serene aesthetic sets tone in 'Pumpkin'

Movie review

Aaron Shakra
Pulse Reporter

"Pumpkin," from first-time directors Anthony Abrams and Adam Larson Broder, is a really strange film. Really, really strange.

But it works in such a way that ends up drawing the viewer into the story, themes and characters, without telling them what to think. And it has absolutely nothing to do with Halloween.

The film played at Bijou Art Cinemas earlier this month, and will come to DVD and VHS on Nov. 5. It opens with Carolyn

McDuffy (Christina Ricci), a USC student and member of the Alpha Omega Phi sorority on campus, scheming with her Greek sisters to win "sorority of the year" by assisting disabled athletes. This scene has a serene, bright aesthetic which alternately sets and offsets the tone of the film throughout its 113 minute run-time.

At first, Carolyn is surrounded by a world of forced cheerfulness, both on her own accord and by her sorority environment. Perfection and imperfection, normalcy and weirdness saunter around her head as she works with her assigned athlete, Pumpkin Romanoff (Hank

Harris). She has an immediate repulsion to him, which turns to a kind of simultaneous affection and attraction.

In one of the funnier moments of the film, her poetry teacher rips apart her "Ode to Pasadena," challenging her to read the poem. She tears it up and throws it in the garbage can halfway through the film, as sort of a breaking point for her character. It's a short scene, but it packs a punch.

And here is precisely where the strength of "Pumpkin" lies — in its subtlety. Take Pumpkin's watercolors, or Carolyn's boyfriend, the cookie-cutter ten-

nis star, Kent (Sam Ball). Or the seamless blending of satire, comedy, drama and edgy subject matter without having to fall into any one of them. The film confronts the racy — both literal and metaphorical — topics under the guise of happy, purposeful cheerfulness without being preachy. To give away more scenes of this balancing act would be spoiling the fun.

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Dole wants teens drug tested to receive driver's licenses

Mark Johnson
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

RALEIGH, N.C. — Elizabeth Dole wants to require all teenagers to pass a drug test before getting a driver's license.

Dole, the Republican U.S. Senate candidate in North Carolina and a former transportation secretary, has promised to push for a federal law pressuring states to enforce such a measure.

"Wouldn't that help them understand how important it is to be drug free?" Dole asked at a recent campaign stop in Washington, N.C. "It's not cool (to abuse drugs). It kills."

Then-President Bill Clinton proposed a nearly identical measure in 1996 while campaigning against Dole's husband, former Sen. Bob Dole, and offered federal grants to states the next year. Campaign officials for Elizabeth Dole said they were unaware of the Clinton initiative.

Dole included the pre-license drug test as part of her "Dole Plan for North Carolina" this year, proposing teens who test positive must complete a drug counseling course and pass another test before getting a license.

The test could be bypassed. Parents who don't want their children to take a drug test could waive the requirement, said Mary

Brown Brewer, Dole's communications director.

"You can't solely address (illegal drugs) from the supply side. You have to address it from the demand side," Brewer said. "When you turn 16, you look so forward to getting that driver's license. This is a pretty strong incentive not to do anything that would prevent you from getting that driver's license."

Dole has made "less government" a campaign mantra, as have many Republicans, which makes it striking that she would embrace an invasive expansion of government duties and authority. Last year, nearly 62,000 North Carolina teens got their first driver's license.

A spokesman for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said he was unaware of any states enacting such a program after the Clinton push.

Dole's opponent, Democrat Erskine Bowles, said he would like to talk with law enforcement officials, parents and teenagers before proposing such a measure.

The testing presents practical obstacles and legal questions. State motor vehicles administrations would suddenly face the costs of processing drug tests through a laboratory, not to men-

tion the idea of testing youngsters who haven't been accused of anything. U.S. courts, though, have repeatedly upheld the constitutionality of drug tests.

Several states have zero tolerance laws on alcohol use, requiring that teens lose their license if caught driving with any amount of alcohol in their blood. The alcohol tests, though, are administered after a youth has been stopped on suspicion of drinking.

Substance-abuse experts said drug testing works as an incentive to keep youths from abusing drugs but likely only until they pass that checkpoint.

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Pumpkins

continued from page 1

grow an assortment of pumpkins on their 20 acres, including varieties for cooking.

Henderson said she doesn't grow huge pumpkins because they are too hard to handle. Sometimes, she

said, customers don't understand that fitting their selections into a Volkswagen isn't possible.

Or if not possible, about as likely as, well, seeing the Great Pumpkin on Halloween.

Contact the reporter at jodyburruss@dailymerald.com.

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