



Courtesy

Zach Braff and Natalie Portman star in the quirky but uneven new film, "Garden State," which will open Friday at the Bijou Art Cinemas.

GARDEN STATE

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home for the first time in nine years and stays with his distant, concerned father (Ian Holm). That his mother, a paraplegic who drowned in the bathtub, might have committed suicide weighs over both of them in every scene they share.

While in town, Andrew meets up with old friends without telling them what he's been doing or why he's back (they all think he's a famous actor now, when in fact he works at a Vietnamese restaurant). He visits a doctor to get some odd headaches examined and we find out the reason for his sleepy personality and numb attitude: He's been heavily medicated since he was nine and is only now letting it clean out from his system.

While at the hospital, he meets compulsive liar and pet lover Samantha (Natalie Portman) and the walls of detachment begin to break down. From this point on the film goes through a couple of the motions of a romantic comedy, but it never goes all out for it; Andrew and Sam's relationship is heartfelt but is presented in a refreshingly easygoing manner.

Throughout all of this, Braff presents us with odd behavior and quirky details. His characters are eccentric in an everyday sort of manner, such as the stoner/gravedigger who speaks fluent Klingon, or the woman who sings a nasal high-pitched version of Lionel Richie's "Once, Twice, Three Times a Lady" at the mother's funeral. The problem is that the quirks don't sync well with the drama and Braff doesn't seem sure what he's trying to accomplish by setting them side by side.

The actors also don't seem to know what tone to set from scene to scene, sometimes being oddball and enduring, sometimes deathly serious. This is more an indictment of the direction rather than the acting, because, as the writer and director, Braff should know what kind of movie he wants this to be. The dialog is often stiff and cumbersome and characters too often talk like people are supposed to talk, as opposed to how people actually talk.

As it stands, "Garden State" is worthwhile for what works, even though it is marred in its mistakes and indulgences. Braff could grow into being a major talent. He's got the potential, but he just needs the maturity.

ryannyburg@dailyemerald.com

BAND

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ing "multifaceted." Not only is it a fun break from the academic overtone that controls the lives of law students, it also "encourages students to retain the interests they had before entering law school — those interests are very important in enriching their lives," Paris said.

The Garden Weasels will play Friday at Agate Hall at 8 p.m. for the annual Welcome (Back) to Law School party, sponsored by Phi Alpha Delta.

Bjerre and Aoki are also in a jazz band with third-year law students Sean Bannon, Emily Schoonmaker and Sean Martin, called the Sophisticatos.

Formed just this last year, the Sophisticatos have already seen their share of success, Bjerre said.

Both bands have played a number of different events and expect to continue doing so through the school year, Bjerre said.

"It's not just a law school thing. We play everywhere," Bjerre said. "[But] we do have day jobs and we're not going to give them up."

Meghann M. Cuniff is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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