

# 'Dog' is engrossing, less funny

Student actors, sets and lighting make up for sub-par script

BY KEN DUSOLD  
Staff Reviewer

Immediately before the curtain went up Tuesday night on "The Little Dog Laughed," the theater took on an unorthodox atmosphere as "E! News Now" played through the speakers, bringing audience members that day's information about their favorite — or most notorious — Hollywood celebrities. This different but very suitable choice on the part of the director, senior Matt Dominguez, and his production crew sets the appropriate mood for the humorous plot, if not the somewhat lacking script.

The Truman production of this 2006 comedy from Douglas Carter Beane is as good as Beane's script will allow. Set design choices are tasteful, complementary to the story and, most importantly, not distracting from the play's events. Suffering slightly from a slow start in Act 1, the ensemble cast of four is gripping by Act 2. Also effective is this production's lighting, which cannot be overlooked as it performs an integral part in the play's frequent and quick changes of location in the staging area. If only the play were as good as its hard working and devoted parts.

Mitchell (junior Cameron Jones) is an aspiring movie star with signature boy-next-door good looks and charm. His career and entire being are shaped and controlled by his friend and caustic agent, Diane (sophomore Fallyn Lee). Diane's job is only made more strenuous by Mitchell's secret homosexuality. While in New York for an awards show



Laura Tyler/Index

Sophomore Fallyn Lee performs in this weekend's production of "The Little Dog Laughed" in the Black Box Theater in Ophelia Parrish.

and the possible purchase of screen rights to a new play, Mitchell gets drunk one night and calls an escort service. Enter Alex (senior Max Glenn), a young and confident professional trying to pay the rent. Nothing amoral happens during their first meeting, but something between them clicks. Besides Diane's like-

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bit of news from their way.

ly annoyance with this potential relationship, another problem arises in the form of Alex's girlfriend, Ellen (senior Madelaine Schmitt). By the time the lights go black for the intermission, Mitchell and Alex informally decide to be together, and only Diane and a surprise Ellen stand in

Serving primarily as an extended setup, the first act does not build enough tension. Fortunately, the real conflict — and plenty of tension — is bottled up in what comes after the intermission.

Jones exudes the qualities necessary for a likeable comedic leading man. He could play the scene in which Mitchell and Alex meet a little drunker, but he still wins the audience with charm, wit and the key advantage of being relatable to anyone who has had high expectations placed upon them.

Glenn gives a solid performance as Alex, despite material

that, at times, leaves something to be desired. With a little more anger during a scene in which Mitchell insults him as a "rent boy," Glenn could give any Broadway actor playing the same part a run for his money.

Not to be outdone by their male costars, Lee and Schmitt are terrific. It is obvious Lee relishes the character of Diane, which makes her so easy to watch throughout. Schmitt has the distinction of playing what might be the most interesting character in Beane's story. Ellen grows as a person, first appearing self-important and immature. Exchanging the chic dresses for sweatpants and a tank top in Act 2, Ellen becomes an adult preparing to take on great responsibility and hoping for a better position in life.

Seniors Steve Roma as scenic designer and Paige Hackworth as lighting designer deserve extra recognition for their success in this production. The set is minimal but not bare, striking the perfect tone. The lighting is well choreographed, taking on the role of quiet dancer as the play's focus shifts often and rapidly.

Sadly, the dialogue does not measure up to the production. With the exception of a few one-liners, the humor is subtle and even muted, particularly in the second act. Of course, the second act also is the more fascinating of the play's two halves. Perhaps, then, it is simply Beane's inability to write comedy well which hurts the intriguing story.

Looking beyond the script, there is much reason to look forward to a night at the theater this weekend. At all times during Truman's performance of "The Little Dog Laughed," the passion is present, efforts appreciated and interest piqued.

## Alien 'Paul' makes disappointing landing



BY KEN DUSOLD  
Staff Reviewer

Paul might like Reese's Pieces, but that does not make him E.T. In fact, this film's title character is as far removed from Steven Spielberg's iconic little cypher as possible in a potentially hilarious, but ultimately mediocre science fiction spoof from British imports Simon Pegg and Nick Frost.

Pegg and Frost achieved cult-level stardom with their 2004 zombie parody, "Shaun of the Dead" and their 2007 action comedy, "Hot Fuzz." In "Paul," the duo set up camp for their newest picture in the American West in an effort to do comedic justice to the alien genre.

As per usual, writers Pegg and Frost also star in their film as Graeme and Clive, two 30-something-

year-old comic book nerds visiting the southwest United States for Comic-Con and a road trip past some of the most legendary alien-associated places (i.e. Area 51 and Roswell, NM). Not long into their trip, the slackers have their lives flipped upside down by Paul (voiced by Seth Rogen), a perpetually stoned and rude alien who has been living in the U.S. for 60 years. After a slightly funny interpretation of the initial alien-nerd encounter that includes probing jokes and Clive's recently finished comic book, the movie continues with Paul's problems following close behind.

The problems manifest themselves in the form of FBI agent Zoil (Jason Bateman), inept and naïve rookie federal agents and "the Big Guy" (Sigourney Weaver). Weaver's Big Guy is portrayed like a James Bond villain — only seen from behind or heard through radio and phone until anti-climactically shown near the end. Also added to the hunt for our heroes is a shotgun-toting fundamentalist Chris-

tian (John Carroll Lynch) whose daughter (Kristen Wiig) is kidnapped by the guys after she sees Paul in their rented RV.

Kudos to Pegg and Frost for successfully making allusions — both obvious and subtle — to almost every classic science fiction film about extraterrestrials. Paul personally makes reference to his contrasting appearance to the cuddly E.T. and the setting for the final showdown is a direct homage to Spielberg's "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" from 1977. The specific mention of those two films is only made better with a literally phoned-in cameo appearance by Spielberg as himself during a flashback. It is suggested that Paul advised Spielberg on script development for "E.T." from a government warehouse reminiscent in look to the warehouse used in Spielberg's "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull."

Pegg and Frost do not forget about the horror genre's take on space creatures either. If one misses Paul's impersonation of



"Paul" co-screenwriter Simon Pegg plays Graeme, a comic book nerd whose travel plans are interrupted by an encounter with Paul, an alien.

Predator, then Weaver's role as a tough-as-nails, determined-to-kill alien hunter could not be confused for anything other than her career-defining performance as Ripley in the "Alien" franchise. "Star Wars" and "Star Trek" jokes are thrown in for good measure, as humor tailored specifically for and about nerds is inevitable when dealing with Comic-Con.

A small cameo by Blythe Danner as the weed-growing and reclusive woman who, as a girl in 1947, rescued Paul after he crash-landed in her front yard is the best performance in the film. Danner stands

out as the only actor in the film who actually remains funny. The other members of the ensemble — Weaver included — seem only interested in getting out the punch lines.

The movie's greatest fault is its failure to realize the potential located in the charming thesis. With a better script, "Paul" could be the preeminent alien parody. If the dialogue were more in the fashion of "Shawn of the Dead" or "Hot Fuzz" — less synthetic and more natural — audiences could fall in love with "Paul," rather than simply chuckle and accept it as substandard comedic

fare. What is most needed and sadly most lacking is the dry wit American audiences have come to appreciate from British invaders like Pegg, Frost, Ricky Gervais, Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie.

Beyond the lesser product from two gifted humorists, "Paul" is best viewed as old-fashioned entertainment. One could play a game of Scene-It or a pop culture version of Trivial Pursuit simply by picking out references in the film. It might not win universal acclaim, but for hanging out at a friend's place on a Friday night, "Paul" would fit right in.

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