

MOVIE REVIEW ★★

# 'Happening' marks a promising breakthrough for slumping Shyamalan

Alexa Milan  
Summer News Editor

The critical response to M. Night Shyamalan's films seems to have gotten increasingly more negative with each movie he's made. He peaked early with the remarkable "The Sixth Sense" and did well with the lesser-known and under-appreciated "Unbreakable." "Signs" and "The Village" were so-so while "Lady in the Water" was a complete disaster. But with "The Happening," Shyamalan shows promise once again, at least with his directing if not his writing.

"The Happening" opens with a seemingly normal day in Central Park: children running, people walking their dogs, friends chatting on a bench. But soon, people start forgetting things, are unable to speak, walk backwards and are ultimately driven to suicide. Suspecting that terrorists have released a toxin into the city, people are forced to evacuate.

Schoolteacher Elliot (Mark Wahlberg) and his estranged wife Alma (Zooey Deschanel) board a train and escape to Pennsylvania, but the train shuts down and they are stuck in the middle of nowhere with their friend's young daughter. As people try to figure out where to go, they find out that people are dying in smaller and smaller populations. They also discover that whatever is happening might not be because of terrorists at all,



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Mark Wahlberg and Zooey Deschanel star in Shyamalan's "The Happening," a film long on directing but short on writing.

but the result of natural causes.

As more people start dying, Elliot and Alma must figure out how to survive and avoid the happening until it passes over.

The plot of "The Happening" is interesting and well-crafted. Through his direction, Shyamalan is able to instill the fear in his audience of trying to survive something infinitely bigger than oneself. It's the film's dialogue that could use a little work.

At times, Wahlberg's and Deschanel's performances feel sub-par, likely due to the stale

writing rather than their abilities as actors. They have been continuously impressive with their previous work, but even they can't communicate the story without the dialogue coming across as forced.

Shyamalan's direction harkens back to his work in "The Sixth Sense." Every shot has a Hitchcockian vibe to it, frightening the viewer without throwing around gratuitous amounts of gore. For the most part, the suicides happen off camera, and it's what viewers don't see that frightens them the most.

Bodies rain down from a rooftop but the camera cuts away before the sickening splat. A woman's legs are in the frame as she bends down, picks up a gun, pulls the trigger and falls as a trail of blood oozes between the cracks in the sidewalk. It is these wordless moments that continue to frighten the audience numbers and keep them in suspense.

Unfortunately Shyamalan's promising directing and his awkward writing don't mesh, causing "The Happening" to fall short of potential. It doesn't come close to the brilliance of "The Sixth Sense," but it's also a step above "The Village" and far superior to "Lady in the Water." Though Shyamalan's had a bit of a slump since his incredible thriller debut, "The Happening" shows there is still hope for him as a director.

## Sneak peek: Fall 2008 cultural calendar

Every year Elon offers a wealth of interesting guest speakers and entertaining arts events, and the upcoming school year is no exception. Here are a few highlights from the Fall 2008 cultural calendar.

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**Charles Cook,**  
"Looking Ahead to  
the 2008 Elections"  
(Sept. 8):

Charles Cook is the founder of The Cook Political Report, an online newsletter that analyzes presidential and congressional elections and campaigns. Known for his non-partisan analysis, he has been featured on CBS, NBC, CNN and in the National Journal.

**ArcheDream for  
Humankind (Sept. 11):**

ArcheDream is a theater troupe that uses dance, pantomime, hand-painted masks, puppetry and ultraviolet light to tell stories from African mythology and other world cultures. This event is part of the Elon University Lyceum Series, and tickets will be available Sept. 2.

**"Invisible Children:  
Rough Cut"**  
documentary  
screening (Sept. 11):

This documentary about child soldiers, displaced citizens and night commuters in Northern Uganda was filmed by Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey and Laren Poole in 2003, when they were in their early 20s. Their trip to Uganda spawned the non-profit organization Invisible Children. Elon's chapter is sponsoring this event.

**Elon Common  
Reading Lecture,**  
Jonathan Kozol  
(Sept. 23):

Jonathan Kozol is an author, national authority on public education and spokesperson for reform in America's public school system. His book, "The Shame of the Nation," which focuses on conditions in inner city public schools, is the Elon Common Reading for 2008-09.

**Jonathan Alter,**  
"Between the Lines:  
Politics, Media and  
Society" (Sept. 29):

Jonathan Alter is the senior editor at Newsweek and has written a column for two decades focusing on politics, media and social and global issues. He is also a contributing correspondent at NBC News. The 2008 election has covered for Newsweek.

**Celtic Crossroads**  
(Oct. 1):

On their second U.S. tour, this group of seven musicians and two step dancers from Ireland will play traditional Irish music as well as a mix of bluegrass, folk and jazz. This event is part of the Elon University Lyceum Series, and tickets will be available Sept. 10.

**Fall Convocation,  
David McCullough**  
(Oct. 23):

David McCullough is a historic author and has won two National Book Awards and two Pulitzer Prizes. In 2006 he was also awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award in the United States. This event is Elon's Baird Pulitzer Prize Lecture, and tickets will be available Oct. 2.

**Joe Garden,**  
"Inside 'The Onion'"  
(Oct. 29):

Joe Garden is a senior writer at "The Onion," the popular weekly print and online newspaper that provides a satirical take on current events. Garden will discuss satire and parody in news coverage and the 2008 presidential election.

**Department of  
Performing Arts  
presents "Sweeney  
Todd" (Starts Oct. 30):**

Elon's Department of Performing Arts will perform Stephen Sondheim's musical about a barber who was sent to prison for a crime he did not commit by a greedy judge and returns to London seeking murderous revenge. The original Broadway production won eight Tony Awards, and last year it was made into a film starring Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham-Carter. Tickets will be available Oct. 9.

**Will Read for Food**  
(Nov. 19):

In this annual event, students, faculty and staff will read selections from their favorite writers in support of the Alamance County Food Bank. The event is sponsored by the Arts and Letters Learning Community, Elon Volunteers! and the Kernodle Center for Service Learning, with support from the English Department.

**Holiday Celebration  
with Luminaries**  
(Dec. 4):

Elon's annual "Festival of Lights" will feature hundreds of luminaries, carol singing, hot chocolate and a visit from Santa Claus as the campus is lit up for the holidays. The event is sponsored by the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life.



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

Author David McCullough will deliver the Baird Pulitzer Prize Lecture on Oct. 23 at Fall Convocation.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.G4TV.COM  
Joe Garden, a senior writer for "The Onion," will speak about satire and parody on Oct. 29.