



COURTESY OF MIRAMAX FILMS

Pint-sized Peter Dinklage (right) plays the smallest third of a trio of lost souls searching for friendship in the inspiring film "The Station Agent."

Small, cliched 'Agent' showcases big talent

BY TOM PREVITE
STAFF WRITER

If you were less than 5 feet tall, you'd probably want to escape, too.

For Finbar McBride (Peter Dinklage), the way to cope with constant belittling is with trains. The diminutive protagonist of "The Station Agent" works in a model train shop in Hoboken, N.J., and finds the collectibles a beacon of hope in his dreary life.

Finbar can't make it through the day without seeing at least one person gawk at him, sometimes going so far as to compare him to one of Snow White's seven dwarves.

So when his mentor, Henry (Paul Benjamin), suddenly dies, leaving Finbar a small piece of land at a deserted railway station in Morris County, the dwarf leaps at the chance to finally be alone.

Unfortunately, fate steps in and Finbar finds himself with inescapable company when he meets gregarious vendor Joe Oramus (Bobby Cannavale) and artist Olivia Harris (Patricia Clarkson).

But — you guessed it — the three come together and eventually form a strong, almost familial bond. A movie so rife with cliches should be horrible. Each character has some sort of life-crippling experience that all too easily forces them together. Finbar has to deal with his size, Joe must care for his ailing father and Olivia struggles to recover from the death of her son and the breakup of her marriage.

What results is a sort of need-based relationship that slowly helps the characters come to

MOVIE REVIEW

"THE STATION AGENT"

★★★

accept — to varying degrees — their lots in life and move forward.

This story has been told countless times in other movies, usually in sappy made-for-television films.

But ironically, "The Station Agent" takes a doomed premise and makes it work.

Call it the realism factor. What makes the film a success is the way it grants moviegoers a window view of the experiences of each character.

You're given the opportunity to eavesdrop on an eclectic group of individuals who remind you all too well of someone you might have met or befriended.

They're so real that you sympathize with them and wonder how close you could have been to being in their shoes.

Chalk it up also to superb acting on all parts. Dinklage hits the bull's-eye as Finbar, the hermetic dwarf who slowly warms up to the idea of socializing with others. Cannavale plays Joe with exuberance as well, carrying the movie's lighthearted moments with unerring accuracy.

Despite its trite premise, "The Station Agent" is an enjoyable movie which hides its flaws under superb storytelling.

It's a wonder what good acting can do.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Adams struggles; Groban dull

Ryan Adams
LLOR N KCOR

★★★

At the first glance of Ryan Adams' new album, you see LLOR N KCOR and wonder what these crazy words mean.

Then in desperation, you look into the mirror with album in hand and it hits you. It's a mirror image. REVELC.

Before the necessary bashing begins, it should be prefaced that this is a good album, just disappearing.

It's like when you find out that Santa Claus is really your dad — there is no fantasy land anymore, which sucks, but there are still the presents, which obviously rocks.

Adams, formerly of the famed alt-country band Whiskeytown, put out two solo albums that gained him the fleeting title of "the next Bob Dylan." The two albums, *Gold* and *Heartbreaker*, floated in the hip circles and were covered in critical acclaim.

But they didn't jump off the shelves like those of Adams' hipster drinking pals, the Strokes. So he hit the studio and recorded the bleak *Love is Hell* (split into two EPs). His record label, Lost Highway, wouldn't release them, and he went back to the studio.

All that confusion is evident on this mirror image. It's rushed — the lyrics lack the tangled brilliance his first attempts had.

Worse yet, it's derivative. At first listen you hear the Strokes fronted

by a Southerner, and then you go, "Hey, that's The Cure! No, The Vines. U2? A decent '80s cover band?"

It's difficult to infer what Adams thinks about this album. Maybe he thinks he is answering the Strokes' album question, *Is This It*, by kicking off his new rock sound with the exultant "This Is It."

It's a good rock song, but Adams doesn't do what he claims: "sing a song for you that's never been sung before." It does just the opposite by copying the Strokes — who are, in fact, copying everyone. And Adams' famous pretentiousness points out the hollowess of the album.

Let's hope that he's singing the truth on "Rock N Roll" and that he believes "Everybody's cool playing rock 'n' roll/I don't feel cool at all," and returns to his roots.

And if this album works progressively, we can hear Adams yearning nostalgically for his old sound after he does his best impression of Kurt Cobain on "Note to Self: Don't Die," moaning "Note to self/Don't change for anyone."

Note to Ryan: You did. But the last five songs make up for the long "F-you" to Lost Highway. Bring back the old sound.

By Kemp Baldwin

Josh Groban
CLOSER

★★

Closer to opera, closer to pop or just closer to the soundtrack to a

Disney movie?

Either way, Josh Groban's latest LP, *Closer*, lacks creativity and sends the listener into an abyss of downright cheesy, sleep-inducing love songs.

Groban begins with Italian lyrics in "Oceano." The listener almost can picture Groban standing on a deserted beach, bellowing to his long-lost love.

Add Spanish guitar music, piano and Groban's overly emotional voice and the image becomes a reality.

But you do have to give him credit for the quality of his voice.

Any great lover of opera probably would appreciate Groban for his talent. And his opera isn't bad.

"Mi Mancherai," probably the most traditional piece on the album, is a beautifully performed and well-produced track. Groban's voice comes strong, rich and powerful.

But even so, the song drones on, ultimately resulting in boredom. With the lack of excitement, Groban would be much better off if he just stuck to opera.

He makes his most painful mistake by adding pop to his operatic sound. He has talent with classical music, but when pop elements are added, disaster follows.

It's like taking Enrique Iglesias and trying to make him an opera singer. Anyone can imagine the results — they aren't far from the train wreck that is *Closer*.

The lyrics don't help much. They sound like recycled dramatic ballads of the '80s and early '90s.

"When You Say You Love Me"

exemplifies this flaw with lines such as, "Like the echoes of our souls are meeting/You say those words, my heart stops beating."

Sadly, it reeks of an old Michael Bolton song.

Groban attempts to appeal to human emotion with his overdramatic, romanticized lyrics, but the result is simply inspirational garbage.

"Remember When It Rained" follows this path. Its title is a good indication of the awful lyrics to come: "Tears of hope run down my skin/Tears for you that will not dry/They magnify the one within/And let the outside slowly die."

In other tracks, the lyrics are thankfully not problematic — however, they're mainly in Italian.

But in case the Italian weren't enough, Groban becomes multilingual by adding French in "Hymne a l'Amour."

If you're going to sing a slew of ridiculous love songs, you might as well sing them in three different languages.

But it's not just the lyrics that fail to impress — some of the music is absolutely unbearable.

"All'improvviso Amore" is by far the album's worst track. The transition from classical opera during the verses to pop during the chorus is almost humorous.

And the fact that most of the tracks are accompanied by a choir, ringing bells and harp makes this music a little too heartwarming.

Frankly, Groban's album is just too close for comfort.

By Leah Konen

VENUES

FROM PAGE 5

in trouble," said Matt Tarpley, an employee at Local 506.

Rick Ramirez, owner of De La Luz, located in the Temple Ball Gallery in Carrboro, pointed out that problems in the music industry are not limited to Chapel Hill or Carrboro.

"I think that it's a very fluid situation, and I think that it's constantly evolving and sometimes devolving," he said.

Chapel Hill has been known for its eclectic blend of musical genres, but even diversity doesn't always guarantee success — changing music tastes might be

damaging some live music venues as well.

"Less people are going out to see live music pretty much all over," he said.

Club owners are struggling because people in Chapel Hill don't go out to see new music as much as owners would like, said Nightlight co-owner Isaac Trogdon.

The club — which doubles as the Skylight Exchange, a used bookstore and sandwich shop, during daylight operating hours — was considering closing its doors after the new year.

But with some radical structural changes in store, Trogdon said, Nightlight is not going to make an exit anytime soon.

Yet the possibility of having to shut down any outlet for local music is troubling.

Even if local interest in live music is present and venues are doing well, money still plays a huge part in both the decisions of both venues and concertgoers.

"Rent is so high in the area and is chasing smaller, independent business owners out," Triplett said. "It's just part of corporate America."

With the recession after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and the war in Iraq straining the economy, people are being more careful how

they spend their money. Music is one of the first things they cross off their list.

"They always say that Chapel Hill and Carrboro are recession-proof, but the economy has had an effect locally," Knapp said.

Musicians, like any local business, are feeling the burn.

Knapp said some local businesses have seen a drop in student-driven revenue as well. This proves to be a real problem for music venues trying to survive in a college town.

Money aside, the thin line between promoting local music and actually making enough money to sustain a business hinges on a sensitive balance.

"Around here, a lot of people go see local bands that they know or have friends in," Tarpley said.

De La Luz, which opened in January, has found that catering to local bands can be a good thing.

Ramirez said that depending on the band, local acts actually can bring in more money because of the huge amount of support in the area. "Since they don't play that often, 150 of their friends will come out and see them," he said.

Cat's Cradle, on the other hand, relies on national touring bands for its success and large fan base.

"If you look at our calendar, we don't make our money promoting

local music," Powers said. "But if there was no Sunday Showcase and we didn't allow local bands to open up for national touring shows, that would hurt the local music scene."

Triplett said Go! aims to provide an even split between the two, providing space for local bands but also getting involved in the national music scene.

Triplett said that by letting local bands play with out-of-town artists, important networking takes place. This makes it possible for local bands to travel to other cities and get more regional publicity.

The balance between letting local acts play and getting national acts through Chapel Hill and Carrboro can be compromised. But booking all the bands that want to take the stage is another problem.

"The most difficult aspect with booking is that there are a limited number of slots and an infinite number of bands. It's hard to give bands a fair shake with the slots on the calendar," Ramirez said.

Though having fewer venues in town could mean added business for surviving clubs and bars, it also might close the door for newer artists and bands seeking exposure.

"If some of these other clubs stop performing and there are fewer venues, booking is going to be more difficult because there are going to be more bands out there trying to play," Ramirez said.

As for the fate of Go!, Triplett said, he hopes closing the doors is not the only option.

Benefit concerts featuring local bands will be held in the next months for the community to show its support for Go!

"There's always going to be a need for live music, and there will always be people who appreciate that," Triplett said. "I have faith that something will work out."

Local music supporters agree on one thing: It's the music that's important.

Whatever happens after that is just the luck of the draw.

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