

The Big Lebowski picks up a spare

As always, mixed reviews follow the latest Coen brothers film

Films by the Coen brothers are rarely ever seen in the same light by anybody. Some critics love them, while others have a field day lambasting their work. Keeping in form, two Gazette reporters couldn't agree on the Coen's latest offering, *The Big Lebowski*.

THE DUDE NAILS A STRIKE

Joel and Ethan Coen attack the world of bowling

BY AMBER MACARTHUR

The Coen brothers have done it again. Without the wood chipper. Without the darkness. Without the drama. In fact, with their new movie, *The Big Lebowski*, the brothers have turned 180 degrees to produce a comedy that glamorizes the life of the bowler, the pot smoker, and the boozier — personified by one man they call "the Dude".

The Dude (Jeff Bridges) lives a very simple life in Los Angeles. He's unemployed, unmarried, and not the

least bit unhappy. He spends his days smoking pot and drinking White Russians with his two best bowling buddies, Walter (John Goodman) and Donnie (Steve Buscemi).

Whereas the Dude is the epitome of relaxed, Walter is the epitome of rage. He is a Polish-Catholic turned Jewish Vietnam war veteran. He is trigger happy, to say the least, and always gets his way. Donnie, on the other hand, is a coward. He does not say much and when he does speak he is terrorized by Walter. Nonetheless, the three men are good friends and spend an outrageous amount of time at their home away from home — the bowling alley.

The scenes in the bowling alley introduce us to some hilarious characters. One such character is a convicted sex offender named Jesus (John Turturro). He and his bowling partner Smokey are determined to win the league championships against the Dude, Walter and Donnie. But suddenly the bowling alley takes on a secondary

role when the Dude is involved in a vicious game of kidnapping along with a wealthy man who just happens to have the same birth name as the Dude — Jeffrey Lebowski.

The wealthy Lebowski wants the Dude to deliver ransom money for the safe return of his kidnapped wife, Bunny. The Dude accepts the mission, even after he is repeatedly assaulted in his home by Bunny's pornography associates, whom he calls the "carpet pissers" because they destroyed his carpet with urine.

The kidnapping turns out to be much more complicated and involves a number of other parties. There are three Germans after the Dude who continuously threaten castration. The Germans are the artsy-fartsy friends of the wealthy Lebowski's daughter, Maud (Julianne Moore). Despite the

Germans, Maud and the Dude develop a unique sexual relationship.

This movie exposes an often absurd high-arts culture. It also looks to the pornography industry for some laughs when Bunny's involvement with well known pornographer Jackie Treehorn is revealed. And through no fault of his own, the Dude gets caught up in both of these cultures, all the while maintaining his cool.

Throughout *The Big Lebowski* you know and understand that the Dude and his friends are low-lives, but you can't help but love them anyway. Their lives are simple and remain simple, even in the midst of disaster. Sure, the characters don't have the depth or intensity of those in *Fargo*, but they are just as nutty. And the bizarre scenes the Coen brothers have created will have you laughing long enough to

know that the two hours spent with a character as original as the Dude were well worth the time and the money.

LEBOWSKI MISSES THE MARK

BY KARAN SHETTY

The Big Lebowski is the first Coen brothers' movie I've seen that I didn't like. The reception to most of their works has been extremely mixed (with the obvious exception of *Fargo*), but I have always been an ardent supporter. I loved *The Hudsucker Proxy*, *Miller's Crossing* and of course the Palme d'Or-winning *Barton Fink*, which many critics found a little too self-indulgent. However, this movie comes across as if some other director was trying to make a Coen brothers rip-off.

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The Gospel of Oedipus

BY NATALIE MACLELLAN

The Gospel at Colonus... well, what exactly can I say? To quote the program: "Greek mythology melds with hip-

swaying, hand-clapping, roof-raising gospel music."

I was hand-clapping, yes. But my hips were still and the roof stayed right where it was.

Neptune's production of *The Gospel at Colonus* was the Canadian premiere of the Broadway hit, and it was also the play's first independent production.

The Gospel at Colonus is Sophocles' play *Oedipus at Colonus* set in a Black Pentecostal Church. As the Pastor (Troy Adams) and the visiting Preacher (Walter Borden) tell the story of Oedipus, the members of the church take on roles and act out the story of Oedipus' redemption.

For those of you who don't know, Oedipus is a character in a trilogy of ancient Greek plays who solves the riddle of the Sphinx, kills his father and marries his mother (unknowingly).

So in the play, the Preacher is reading from the Book of Oedipus and the choir is Hallelujah-ing left, right and centre. It's a bit odd for someone who has studied classical mythology, but it was entertaining.

Jackie Richardson did a wonderful job as Oedipus' daughter Antigone. Jeri Brown, an internationally respected jazz vocalist, played the other daughter, Ismene. While she wowed the audience with her voice, she was far from convincing as an actress. Jeff Jones put in an amazing performance as Oedipus.

In general, *The Gospel at Colonus* gives a pretty fair representation of the Oedipus story, but with a few minor exceptions.

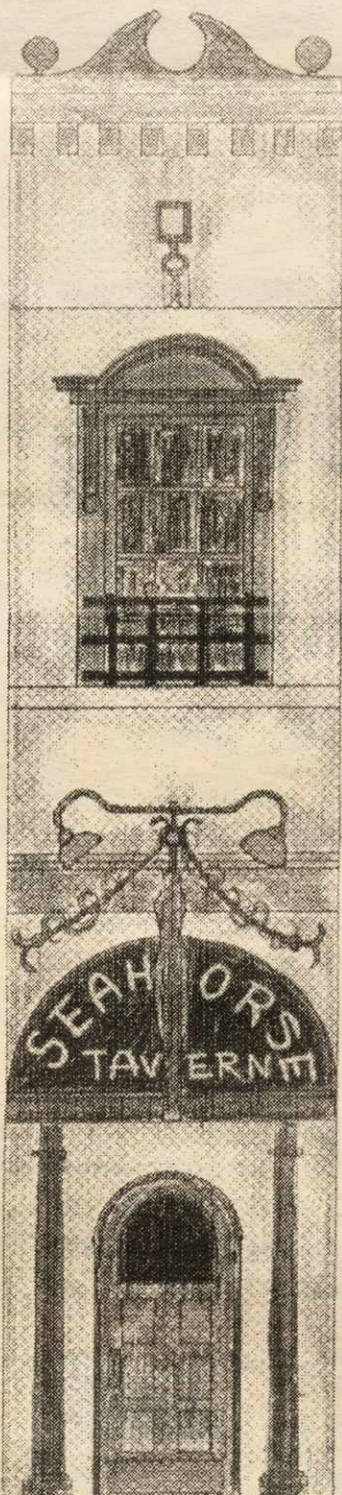
Polyneices, Oedipus' son/brother comes to Colonus for his father/brother's blessing and support in his war against his other brother. Oedipus refuses to support either, and he curses both sons/brothers, hoping they will kill each other in battle. Then Polyneices dies. Just like that. He falls and dies. It was supposed to be symbolic of a later death, I think, but the symbolism seemed so out of place with the rest of the play that I only got it because it was in the program.

Then there was Oedipus' death. He knows it's his time and everybody is singing about it. The floor opens up and Oedipus sinks down gloriously. And it hit me. Oedipus was Jesus. It was ingenious and appalling all at once. I was suddenly watching a passion play. Amazing.

Only minutes later, my theory was proven as the people are celebrating his redemption, and out of the sky comes Oedipus, looking glorious in a white robe, and he sings along with them, glowing in the grace of God.

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