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section

# Coen brothers don't live up to expectations

## Newest release, *The Big Lebowski*, flops because of bad plot, characters



gamecock critic **ROB LINDSEY**

**THE BIG LEBOWSKI**  
★★ (out of five stars)

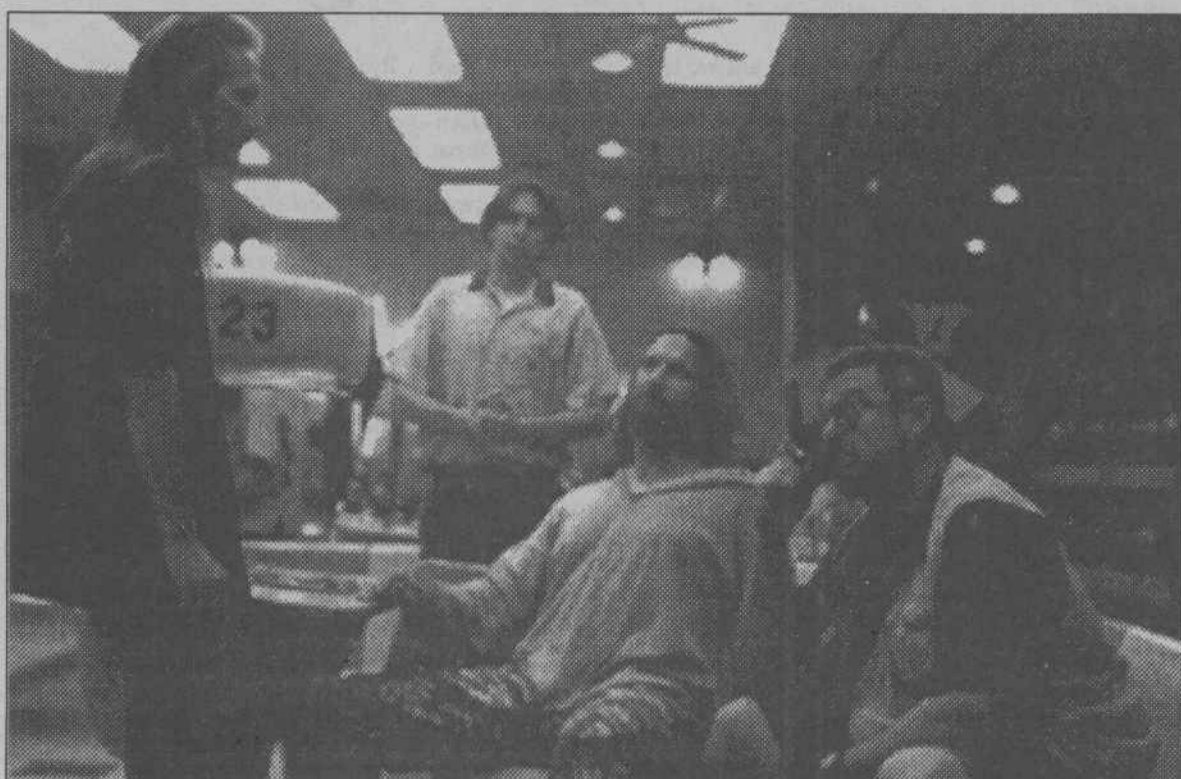
The *Big Lebowski* is a compound fracture; so mangled that even super glue, spackle and six months in a cast couldn't put Humpty back together.

Joel and Ethan Coen (the infamous Coen brothers) have tried to create a quirky, satirical look at such genres as burnout buddy movies, kidnapping/ ransom plots, westerns and porn.

In the hands of the usually fabulous Coens, this sort of mix should be clever, witty and well crafted, but *Lebowski* falls far short, appearing as a conscious attempt to follow (or to avoid following) the widespread critical success of 1996's *Fargo*. Attempting to push the envelope of quirkiness, they simply tear it to shreds.

Even with the inherent incongruity of the pieces of this puzzle, a dominant central character, a foil against which the quirkiness could play out, could have pulled the mess together.

"The Dude" (a lackluster Jeff Bridges) should have been that character, but he suffers from the same overload of strangeness as the rest of the film. As for the rest of the characters, none come close to possessing the en-



SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK  
(left) From right to left, Walter, Donny and The Dude talk to a fellow bowler about the upcoming championship games. (top) The Dude and Maude appear together in a dream.

dearing qualities fans have come to expect from the Coens.

There's Walter (John Goodman) as the stereotypically over-the-top Vietnam vet, the "Big Lebowski" (David Huddleston) as a perpetually yelling paraplegic businessman, and Maude (Julianne Moore) as his pointlessly eccentric daughter. Also, muddling up the plot are a group of nihilists, a producer of porn videos, and the Big Lebowski's smarmy yes-man.

As for the plot, it's much too contrived and virtually unimportant, probably the least important part of the film. The characters are supposed to hold the audience's interest, but they are so outrageous they offer little to relate to, much less to care about.

The ever-confused and extremely under-used Donny (Steve Buscemi) comes close to engendering some feelings of sympathy, as he continually tries to figure out what's happening. But,

just as the audience, his attempts are continually thwarted.

If Donny indeed represents the audience, his eventual demise speaks volumes about the Coens' mentality after the success of *Fargo*. Instead of simply making wonderful movies as they did before they gained the attention of the mainstream critical world, they are now conscious that they are and will be watched. In trying to ignore these eyes, the quality of their storytelling has faltered. Quirkiness only works to an extent, but the movie has to work, too. And this one doesn't.

The high point of the film is Joel Coen's beautiful direction. The scenes in the bowling alley (with a hilarious John Turturro cameo) are the best in the movie. If nothing else, the Coen brothers should be applauded for their fearlessness in trying new things. Perhaps they don't always succeed in creating a coherent vision, but at least it can be fun to watch them fail.

# Town Theatre show enjoyable despite casting problems

gamecock critic **JENNIFER STANLEY**

Despite some weak points, the Town Theatre's production of Cole Porter's "Anything Goes" was still de-lovely, to quote one of the play's famous songs.

The play, which runs until March 28, is the story/musical of Reno Sweeney, a red-hot evangelist turned nightclub act, and honest but resourceful Billy Crocker, who in turn loves moderately poor socialite Hope Harcourt, who is

engaged to a wealthy, titled Lord Evelyn Oakleigh, who in turn loves Sweeney without knowing it.

Crocker stows away on the S.S. American to be near Hope, much to the consternation of his boss, Elisha Whitney. The plot livens up even more when Public Enemy No. 13 and his side-kick Erma are aboard the ship.

The music includes Cole Porter tunes such as "Anything Goes," "Friend-

ship," "I Get a Kick Out of You" and "Blow, Gabriel, Blow."

While the songs are catchy, the three-man band provides the bare essentials. With percussion and keyboard on the stage-sized boat, the keyboard-produced saxophone music was too cheesy and seemed more like a short-cut than a real rendition of the saxolo.

The music selection offered a combination of humor, jazz and romance.

But, most of all, the quick dance numbers stand out. Most of the cast delivered an excellent, applause-deserving dance performance that showed hard work and lively fun.

The boat was a good point of the production, showing real effort on the part of the set designers. The two-story S.S. American, which has "sneak peaks" into the guest cabins, makes the production more believable and definitely

brings that big, Broadway feeling to the small, but comfortable Town Theatre.

The cast works for and against the success of guest director Jim E. Quick's production. While Leah McNeeley-Tudor (Hope) is talented, she did not fit the picture of a 20-year old debutante, and I did not see any chemistry or any "pretend" attraction between McNeeley and Moon (Crocker).

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