



SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

Simon Birch (Ian Michael Smith), a small boy with big dreams, shares ice cream with his friend Joe Wentworth (Joseph Mazello).

## LIGHTS! CAMERA! REACTION!

### SIMON BIRCH

(out of five stars)

Simon Birch was the smallest delivery ever recorded in the history of Gravestown Memorial Hospital. The doctors proclaimed him a miracle, and ever since, he's been quick to remind anyone who forgets. Simon is certain he's going to be a hero... he's just not sure how. His destiny becomes linked to that of his best friend Joe after a tragic high foul ball.

Starring Ian Michael Smith, Oliver Platt and Ashley Judd. Written and directed by Mark Steven Johnson, suggested by the novel "A Prayer for Owen Meany" by John Irving.

gamecock critic **EMILIE GREENE** ★★★

According to the credits, "Simon Birch" is "suggested by" John Irving's novel "A Prayer for Owen Meany," but

reportedly, Irving himself was so dissatisfied with the outcome of the movie that he refused any involvement. I do not doubt for a moment that the novel is far superior, as almost all books are, to its film version. I, however, have not read the book, and I enjoyed the movie immensely in and of itself.

Perhaps one of the strongest points in the movie's favor is its appropriate casting. Ashley Judd's performance surpasses any of her recent work, and Oliver Platt proves with depth and candor that he can be more than just a comic character actor. Ian Michael Smith is a compelling Simon—rarely sentimental and never melodramatic. However, despite the fact that Smith has the title role, the most impressive cast member is Joseph Mazello as Simon's friend Joe.

Both Mazello's character and his portrayal are authentic and above all, mature. There are several instances when either the film or the actor could rely on standard movie clichés—particularly after the death of Joe's mother—but neither fall into the trap. Joe is a 12-year-old faced with more

than one tragedy, and Mazello performs even the most complicated scenes with admirable simplicity and realism.

Some of the strength of the acting has to be, at least in part, due to the script, which is well-written for the most part. However, there are a few problems.

Jim Carrey appears in the first, and last scenes in an unadvertised cameo, which is more of a distraction than an asset. He also provides the voiceovers, which are unnecessary and consequently annoying. The acting and writing within the scenes are conscientious enough already. Further explanations through voiceovers seem entirely too obvious. A few scenes are also more contrived than the rest of the film, like a Christmas pageant sequence which unsuccessfully attempts slapstick comedy in an already moving drama.

Still, the acting and writing in "Simon Birch" overcome these imperfections. Though flawed, the movie remains remarkably sincere. As a whole, the film moves the audience while provoking thought about family, friendship and most importantly, faith.

gamecock critic **BRIAN MARTIN** ★★★★★

"Simon Birch" is a story about faith and destiny and how a really little kid tries to make sense out of all of it. Oh, and he's horny, too.

This film is also the first for Ian Michael Smith, and it's an impressive debut. As the exceptionally small Simon, Smith provides an intelligent character. One can't help feeling sorry for him as he faces his many obstacles. Simon courses with pure honesty, and this is what frequently gets him into trouble. As said before, he's horny. However, he portrays his character, who believes he is on a mission from God, with such conviction that, although he almost sounds

crazy, you just can't help but believe him.

The film is less a story about Simon Birch and more a film about the people he interacts with and the lives he touches. Cast highlights include both David Strathairn as the troubled Rev. Russell and Oliver Platt as Ben Goodrich, the suitor of Ashley Judd's character. Both deliver strong performances.

Strathairn is wonderful as a priest who often seems to find himself confused by the implications of his faith. And Platt, who has been seen this year in such films as "Bulworth" and "Doctor Doolittle," plays a very different kind of character as the caring and nurturing Goodrich, further proving his versatility as an actor. That's not to undermine the rest of the cast, which does a fantastic job as well. Joseph Mazello, who is probably best remembered as Tim, the kid who threw up in the juggernaut "Jurassic Park," has finally landed in a dramatic role, as Simon's best friend Joe. He begins to show a maturity in his acting. Ashley Judd is radiant, as usual, as his single mother. The cast also features a barely recognizable Jan Hooks as the overbearing Sunday school teacher Miss Leavey, as well as a special appearance by Jim Carrey, who provides narration as the older version of Joe.

The characters are endearing, and so is the story. Despite some very predictable plot elements, such as the revelation about Joe's father, the story still delivers surprises. Just as you think you know where Simon's mission is leading him, the film takes an abrupt turn and ends in a totally different way. The film truly touches something inside the viewer, which more than makes up for the totally clichéd final scene featuring Carrey and his son (who is, incidentally, played by Joseph Mazello's brother).

"Simon Birch" probably won't break any box office records, but it is a significant film that will doubtlessly be looked upon, and learned from, for decades to come.

gamecock critic **JAMIE BOWMAN** ★★½

As if being 12 years old isn't hard enough, imagine being afflicted with dwarfism, having parents that wish you'd never been born and being the cause of death of your best friend's mother (Ashley Judd). For Simon Birch (Ian Michael Smith) this was a harsh reality.

The movie is set in Gravestown, Maine and begins with an older Joe Wentworth (Jim Carrey) visiting his best friend Simon's grave. The plot builds up through a series of clichéd life lessons and depicts society's cruel and insensitive ways through the eyes of the two outcasts.

The part of Simon is played with a clever wit in combination with a series of one-liners that play off his frail size. Ian Michael Smith gives a strong performance. His character is well developed, but the others seem weakly thrown together.

Throughout the film, Simon makes references to the idea that "God has a plan for us all." Simon's search for heroism and redemption parallels Joe's search for his father, a secret that his mother took with her when she died.

In regards to "A Prayer for Owen Meany," the film is basically a loose spin-off of Chapter 1, but there are classic moments that shouldn't be missed: the softball game, the armadillo and the dreaded conclusion.

Had I not read the book prior to watching the film, I would have enjoyed it a lot more. As it stands, the movie is worth seeing and there are a few tear-provoking scenes that stay with you long after the movie has ended.

## EXHIBITS

•NatureSpace, throughout September, South Carolina State Museum. Admission fee required. For more information, call (803) 898-4921.

•"Mexican Masks of the 20th Century: A Living Tradition," through Nov. 8, McKissick Museum. For more information, call (803) 777-7251.

•Mexican Mask Fiesta (held in conjunction with opening of Mexican Mask exhibition), 7-9 p.m., Sept. 24, McKissick Museum. Free admission for members; \$5 for non-members.

## CONCERTS

•Seven Foot Politic, 12:30 p.m., Sept. 24, Elbow Room.

•"A Stranger In This Country" (the Scottish-American ballad and song connection), 7:30 p.m., Sept. 25, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. For ticket information, call (803) 799-1746.

•Carolina MusicFest '98, Sept. 25-26, uptown Charlotte. For ticket information, call (704) 522-6500.

•Celine Dion (with special guest Andre-Philippe Gagnon), 8 p.m., Sept. 27, Charlotte Coliseum. For ticket information, call (704) 522-6500.

## EVENTS

•"Odyssey" by the Aquila Theatre, 7:30 p.m., Sept. 29, Koger Center. \$15 adults, \$8 students.

•"West Side Story," through Oct. 3, Town Theatre. For ticket information, call (803) 799-2510.

•"Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," through Oct. 4, Longstreet Theatre. For more information, call (803) 777-2552.

## Elbow Room, CP serves up Blue Plate Special

staff writer **BECKY MCCLELLAN**

"Are you tired of the same old lunch routine? Do you love live music? Are you short on money? If you answered "yes" to these questions, then come out at 12:30 p.m. to the Russell House Patio on Thursdays to check out the Blue Plate Special.

Sponsored by the Elbow Room and Carolina Productions, the Blue Plate Special is a concert series showcasing local bands from around the Southeast. Seven bands are participating, with one performing each week through Oct. 15. The bands involved with the Blue Plate Special come to Columbia to perform at the Elbow Room on Thursday nights, but arrive early to play a free show for the USC campus during lunch.

"It's a taste of what's going on at the Elbow Room," said Vance McNabb, Elbow Room owner. "It also gives students who are involved with Carolina Productions a chance to organize a concert event."

The Sept. 3 show featuring the Mellow Blue Marsh Band canceled because of rain, so the concert series commenced on Sept. 10 with The Marvelous 3 from Atlanta. They attracted students to

their show with an energetic performance of tossing guitar picks and entertaining stage choreography.

Last week, Charlotte's Come On Thunderchild took the stage at the Russell House playing a classic style rock. They opened for The Derek Trucks Band at the Elbow Room that night.

"The Elbow Room has been very supportive of us out of town," band member John Morris said. "As far as the kind of hospitality an out of town band can receive, it's unprecedented."

Come On Thunderchild also performed in Columbia when they opened up for Sister Hazel at the Carolina Coliseum on Sept. 4.

"They have a good sound, but I wish the concert at the Patio was more publicized," junior Dorian DelPriore said.

If you missed the first two performances, you still have four more to go. The upcoming bands include Seven Foot Politic, Urban Grind, Albert Hill and Hello Dave. Come out to the Russell House Patio around noon, get some food and find a seat by the stage to eat and listen to some live music—and best of all, it's free! You can catch the bands again at the Elbow Room that night. Anyone 18 and older is welcome.

## Puppet Regime announces fall season

staff writer **MARTHA WRIGHT**



Ruth Nettles THE GAMECOCK

Senior journalism major **Ralph D'Ambrose** as Eddie in last year's "Rocky Horror Picture Show" will be co-directing this year.

USC's Puppet Regime, a student organization of thespians and theater aficionados, agreed last Wednesday to put on four different shows for the fall season.

The group will present a live performance of the "Rocky Horror Picture Show" at 11 p.m. at the Russell House Theater on Oct. 29 through 30. In the tradition of this production, members of the Puppet Regime will reprise their roles as uber-nerds Brad and Janet and the sweetest of transvestites, Frank-N-Furter.

"Getting a lot of people in a closed space is kind of what 'Rocky's' about," said senior Ralph D'Ambrose.

Later in the season they have planned tentatively on "All in the Timing," a play based on improvisational theater games; "Underground Lovers," an experimental play that revolves around love in the subway; and "Heads: A Communist Love Story," written by Chris Compton, an American University student. Compton is a friend of senior Ali Freeman, who is acting president of the Puppet Regime.

"Getting a lot of people in a closed space is kind of what 'Rocky's' about."

**Ralph D'Ambrose**

"Rocky Horror Picture Show" cast member

All the plays the group selected were suggested by members of the Puppet Regime. Wendy Mauritz said she recommended the play "Underground Lovers" because of the variety and number of unusual characters roaming the subway station. In one scene, a row of people with masks on backwards is facing away from the audience. Then the people are encountered by the protagonist.

"They're strangers until he brings their faces out," Mauritz said.

The Puppet Regime elected incoming officers during the Wednesday meeting. Kyle Stevens and Wendy Mauritz were voted co-presidents. Kerry Doherty is incoming vice president, Sarah Hammond is treasurer and Emily Davidson is secretary. These officers will serve after shadowing the current officers.

The group also addressed some issues that will affect theater at

USC. Jim Hunter, adviser for the theater department, brought up the administration's plans to build a new performance facility in the basement of the Booker T. Washington auditorium. The stage will be available for use around September 1999. Hunter also suggested off-stage plays to increase the group's visibility.

Another issue concerning the group was practice space. Junior Lindsay Wray offered up a solution to scheduling conflicts.

"We've taken our roots through student government. That's where we need to start," Wray said.

"If you want to go to a powerful person to get space, you need to go straight to administration," Ali Freeman said.

For more information about Puppet Regime, call the USC theater department at 777-4288.

**-UPCOMING CONCERTS-**

9/24 SWING NIGHT W/ SEVEN FOOT POLITIC  
9/25 JOLENE W/ ROBBIE FULKS  
9/26 SPIDERMONKEY  
9/29 PATRICK DAVIS GROUP

HAPPY HOUR M-F (FREE POOL, FREE PIZZA, DRINK SPECIALS)  
See our full concert calendar @ [www.elbowroom.com](http://www.elbowroom.com)  
ELBOW ROOM IS 18 + UP FOR ALL CONCERTS

23 49 63  
69 13 45 26 67 6  
07 09 68 4

**LOTTERY**

LOTTERY SEPTEMBER 30  
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Priority Reservations Lottery  
2nd Floor Lobby Russell House  
September 30, 1998

9 a.m. - 1st Ballroom Date  
10 a.m. - 2nd Ballroom Date

For more information, contact the Reservations Office at 777-7127 or stop by Russell House 218.

## Russell House University Union Priority Reservations for January to July 1999

**PRIORITY I: University Wide Event.....September 25, 1998**  
(See Definition on pages 123-124 in the Carolina Community)

**PRIORITY II: Carolina Productions.....September 28, 1998**  
(See Definition on page 124 in the Carolina Community)

**PRIORITY III: Registered Student Organizations.....September 30, 1998**  
(See Information below for times for the Lottery on Sept. 30, 1998)

**PRIORITY IV: Other.....October 2, 1998**  
(Academic Departments or Administrative Units or other student organizations as designated in the Carolina Community, page 124)

**NOTE:** Academic Space will not be reserved until **January 25, 1999**  
(See Definition on pages 123-124 in the Carolina Community)

**\*\*Lottery September 30\*\* Lottery September 30\*\***

Because of the high demand for room usage in the Russell House a "lottery" system is used to ensure equitable distribution of space to registered student organizations. The highest level of demand is for Ballroom reservations, however, the lottery system will apply to all reservable rooms in the Russell House.