

# Paul Rudd Makes a Difference as ‘Our Idiot Brother’

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Advertised deceptively as a comedy, the new film “My Idiot Brother” has a Zen-like quality that is surprising, and oddly captivating, but cannot sustain itself and eventually runs out of steam. Paul Rudd plays the brother to three errant sisters, portrayed by Elizabeth Banks, Zooey Deschanel and Emily Mortimer.

This is more of a slice-of-life than a laugh out loud comedy, but the elements of the absurd post-millennial life of the characters does contribute to knowing chuckles and reflections about the truth that families often hide. In that sense the film attempts redemption, but the story shifts to provide a happy ending that leaves the characters wanting for more, including the Idiot Brother.

Ned (Rudd) practices organic agriculture and happily plies his trade at a local East Coast farmer’s market. He is a kind, trusting presence in all the lives he touches, even selling pot to a police officer because the cop tells Ned he’s had a bad week. After being arrested and serving his time in prison, Ned finds out he has been kicked off the farm by his former girlfriend Janet (Kathryn Hahn) and is now separated from his beloved dog named Willie Nelson.



Forced to go back to his family for help, he infiltrates the lives of his three sisters, Miranda (Elizabeth Banks), Natalie (Zooey Deschanel) and Liz (Emily Mortimer). Liz is married to Dylan (Steve Coogan), a documentary maker, and they provide a bed and income for him, even as he

complicates their lives. His encounters with the other siblings also creates some revealing truths, for Ned believes that the world is better off trustworthy, though reality can often demonstrate otherwise.

Paul Rudd wears the hippie-esque brother persona well, providing an energy that clashes iridescently with the brash and cold real world. His inner peace is mistaken for idiocy many times, and even his family doesn't know what to make of his live-and-let-live way of thinking. Rudd wisely underplays the character, allowing the circumstances to determine Ned's fate. It is the world around him that can't embrace or understand his kind and honest soul, so it is Ned that becomes the idiot freak, while the rest of his family categorize themselves as "normal."

The cast has some fun with their characters, with Elizabeth Banks a highlight as a hard driven writer for Vanity Fair magazine. T.J. Miller portrays the boyfriend named Billy who replaces Ned on the organic farm, who amusedly has more in common with Ned than the girlfriend Janet. And Rashida Jones plays against her cute girlfriend type as a rough and tumble lesbian lawyer, who counsels kidnapping the dog Willie Nelson in lieu of a lawsuit. The strength of the cast is how they play off of Rudd's Ned, which allows their own flaws to percolate in contrast to his demeanor.

It is the last act that breaks up the feel of the previous actions in the film. In trying to wrangle out a happy ending, the screenwriters Evgenia Peretz and David Schisgall (sister and brother-in-law of director Jesse Peretz) struggled for an honest end to the story, and the Idiot Brother changes from irritant to savior. This switch would take more forgiveness from the sisters than the situation implies, and deflates the film like a balloon with a unstoppable leak.



T.J. Miller as Billy Carries Willie Nelson the Dog in 'Our Idiot Brother'  
Photo credit: Nicole Rivelli for The Weinstein Company

Reasonably, though, it does have a welcome and different vibration than most mainstream star system movies, with a in-film tribute to the late comedy director Blake Edwards (in the form of his 'Pink Panther' movies) and the simple soulfulness of Ned. It was just unfortunate that it turned away from that vibe when the difficult emotions emerged and hit the fan. Why couldn't there be another way to the end of the journey that mirrored the same path that preceded it?

It will be interesting to see where Paul Rudd goes from this film. Here he proves that he can develop more unusual role types than his befuddled coolness in previous efforts like "Dinner for Schmucks" and "I Love You, Man." Our Idiot Brother is a step in another direction, what direction is to be determined.

*"Our Idiot Brother" opens everywhere August 26th. Featuring Paul Rudd, Elizabeth Banks, Rashida Jones, Zooey Deschanel, Steve Coogan, Emily Mortimer, Kathryn Hahn and T.J. Miller. Screenplay by Evgenia Peretz and David Schisgall, directed by Jesse Peretz. Rated "R"*



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