

## ‘C.O.G.’ is a Touching Indication of Life’s Crossroads

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 22, 2013 - 2:07pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Finding identity, especially in the post-collegiate twentysomething time of life, is often fraught with accidental circumstance and heartache. The new film “C.O.G.,” adapted from a short essay from author David Sedaris, is a beautifully sensitive comedy about that rocky identity road, portrayed through a youthful and somewhat clueless preppy from Yale.

“C.O.G.” is perfectly adapted by writer/director Kyle Patrick Alvarez, and exquisitely portrayed by an ensemble cast anchored by Jonathan Groff. It never overplays the narrative hand regarding Groff’s persona, and the transition that occurs within him in the film is discovered simultaneously by the character and the audience – especially if there is no knowledge of the source essay by David Sedaris. This is a nice snapshot of America as well, the part of the country that is considered either “flyover” or “backwards,” and it’s refreshing to see the Eastern elitist more of a fish-out-of-water than his fellow small town archetypes. It is also about faith, youth and that time of life in which experiencing the journey is much more educating than the blank slates presented in classrooms. Everyone, at some level or another, can relate to this film.

David (Jonathan Groff) arrives in Oregon from Yale University, fresh off a graduate degree. He seeks the road of experience, taking a job with immigrants picking apples. His girlfriend Jennifer (Troian Bellisario) was to join him, but at the last minute decides not to do it and leaves him there alone. Luckily the crusty old orchard owner named Hobbs (Dean Stockwell) takes a shine to David, and gets him a job at the apple sorting plant.



David (Jonathan Groff) Phones for Help in ‘C.O.G.’  
Photo credit: Focus World

It is at the plant that the differences in social/economic circumstances come to light for David. A friendly fork lift operator named Curley (Corey Stoll) is his only co-conspirator in town, but that relationship ends when Curley unleashes some surprising secrets. David quits the plant, and is taken in by a Christian emissary named Jon (Denis O'Hare) – an army veteran, stone carver and church goer. This is the phase that David requires to understand himself, but what results might be too much to bear.

The film is centered on Jonathan Groff's performance, and they found a stellar actor for the rendering of the many changes David goes through. Handsome as a preppy should be, with the right amount of arrogance coming into the "working class life," Groff plays David as a nice but malleable soul who blows with the wind, and because of that is able to discern what his life actually needs. Most impressive is the curiosity – rather than disgust – he displays toward his surroundings, despite his arrogance. His character is also nicely symbolized by a silly Yale sweater, which gets more battered as the journey moves forward.

The ensemble cast is up for the story as well, especially Corey Stoll as Curley and Denis O'Hare as Jon. Both are particular and rich roles, and each actor brings more to the table than what is written. Stoll radiates the confidence and cruelty of understanding Curley's secrets, and O'Hare projects the residual anger when his character can't connect to reality. Harry Dean Stanton was perfect as the crusty but perplexed orchard owner, who taught lessons to David and rewarded him when he learned them.

Faith is an interesting theme, and the use of that faith as an arbiter for behavior. In David's search for self-realization, religion does play a part. The director doesn't condemn it, but allows an embracing that portrays a larger theme. It illustrates how people can use religion as both a crutch and comfort, and that is exactly the way to exhibit that partisan issue on screen. Most impressive is a Christian family that takes David in – they are not judged in any way, they are what they are. It's actually poignant.



David Seeks Counsel from Jon (Denis O'Hare) in 'C.O.G.'

*Photo credit: Focus World*

There is fulfillment at the conclusion, and a feeling that David did actually make his life experience goals, and will begin anew with another phase in the adventure. And isn't that just like life? When the end to anything comes, it means another beginning. This also a very Christian notion – as the end comes in physical life, the next phase is the metaphysical. "C.O.G." is layered with this type of hope, and is a treat for the inner consciousness.

The tartness of the David Sedaris "attitude" is as evident as the assembly line of apples in the film. In the realm of true-telling, there is no one better philosopher than a person willing to face demons and decisions, and move down the road, feeling the ground beneath their feet.

*"C.O.G." has a limited release on September 20th, including Chicago at the Gene Siskel Film Center. See local listings for theater locations and show times. Featuring Jonathan Groff, Dean Stockwell, Corey Stoll, Denis O'Hare and Troian Bellisario. Screenplay adapted and directed by Kyle Patrick Alvarez. Rated "R"*



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