

Solid acting, inventive story elevate 'Sense'

By **CLIFF HICKS**
Film Critic

Whoever was responsible for the ad campaign behind "The Sixth Sense" should be shot.

Instead of pitching the film for what it is — an uncomfortable little spook show drama — people who see the commercials are left with the impression that there will be a lot more action than "The Sixth Sense" actually offers.

Of course, action would have been the one thing that would have killed this film faster than a sharp tent peg could put a vampire down.

"The Sixth Sense" tells the story of a boy named Cole (Osment) who sees ghosts. The ghosts are slowly driving him mad. Child psychologist Dr. Malcom Crowe (Willis) sets out to try and help him.

Bruce Willis rarely gets credit for being a solid actor, but his performance in this film is both subtle and elegant — in short, all the things we've forgotten he can be.

The film really belongs to Osment, however, who not only brings Cole to life as a character, but causes the audience to invest a bit of themselves into him. It's rare to see a child actor with this much talent, and "The Sixth Sense" would not have worked without Osment's fantastic performance.

Writer/director M. Night Shyamalan weaves an intricate tale that deals with both the supernatural and the emotional, both personal and religious. Much of the camerawork matches the pacing of the film, with lingering pauses and only brief flashes of the ghosts themselves.

No matter what the trailers imply, this is not a film with quick jolts of fear and terror (well, okay, there is one) but the story of a troubled youth who's ostracized because of his problems coping with his special ability.

Many people exiting the theater at the same time as me seemed completely in shock of the ending, but I found it a logical conclusion to the film.

Either cinema goes becoming



COURTESY PHOTO
HALEY JOEL OSMENT is a child with a knack for otherworldly communication and Bruce Willis is his understandably concerned psychologist in the chill-providing film "The Sixth Sense."

more naïve or less attentive, because a watchful eye won't find the ending awkward in the slightest.

"The Sixth Sense" isn't a scary film so much as it is a chilling film. It's not a film that is frightening so much as it is eerie. To be blunt, you won't wake up in the middle of the

night with nightmares from this film. (Or at least, you shouldn't, and if you do, you're a wimp.)

It is, however, an excellent piece of cinema and a good sign that stories are starting to become important to movie makers again. Expand your senses.

The Facts

Title: "The Sixth Sense"
Stars: Bruce Willis, Haley Joel Osment, Toni Collette, Olivia Williams
Director: M. Night Shyamalan
Rating: R (violence, language)
Grade: A-
Five Words: A chilling little ghost story

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Music

L7
"Slap-happy"
Wax Tadpole Records
Grade: B

Since they sprung from the seedy underbelly of Los Angeles' dirty glam-slut punk scene in 1985, the members of L7 have continued to prove that they are not the type of girls to bring home to ma and pa.

They are, however, the type of girls to bring home if ma and pa happen to have a hankering for sonic-fuzz infested crunchy guitar riffs, steady and grinding tempos and nasally yet hypnotic vocal cadences — like my parents.

It's characteristics like the ones listed above that have kept L7 in the guts of many fans for much of the 1990s. You just can't shake 'em, they're simple and lovable like the Ramones but naughty like Motorhead. Add to that a pissed feminine toughness like Joan Jett and you've got enough spit and gravel to pave the road to rock and roll hell and back, complete with a stop at the local liquor store.

Of course L7's road is one seldom traveled by mainstream America, and aside from the 1992 alternative hit "Pretend We're Dead" and their 1994 slot on the Lollapalooza tour, the group has remained in relative obscurity, despite being on a major record label for much of the time.

But that doesn't mean these girls

haven't been busy.

Since their self-titled 1990 debut release on the independent punk label Epitaph, L7 has released 5 albums, including 1998's "Live: Omaha to Osaka." Their most commercially successful album was their major-label debut "Bricks are Heavy," on Slash records.

Recently L7 has gone full circle after a messy split from Reprise records and have released their latest album, "Slap-happy," on their newly-founded label — Wax Tadpole Records.

The title of the first track on "Slap-happy" is enough to let everyone know that L7 is as gritty as ever. "Crackpot Baby" feels as heavy and infectious as an 18-pack of Bud-heavy longnecks, but not any old 18-pack, the kind you can only get in Texas because each bottle has a picture of the state on it.

Oh no, it gets worse.

The second track, "On My Rockin Machine," has a quick downstroke tempo with L7's signature chunky and muted guitar riffs that adds up to about a two and a half minute-long kick in the nuts. Ah, such sweet destruction.

Much of the album flows at about the tempo of a Camero cruisin' in second gear, with an occasional shift into third for a quick corner. It's a good speed because you're sitting in a Camero, but sometimes it becomes a bit tedious and at times even mopeds

have the balls to pass you. Lyrically, the group has left vocabulary on the curb and generally sticks with easy rhymes and basic word usage.

While many of the tracks show little departure from L7's tried and true recipe for post-punk aggressive rock, some tracks introduce a side of L7 most probably didn't know existed. A groovy side. Yes, I said it. A groovy side.

On "Livin' Large," the name itself shows a change from past titles like "Wargasm" and "Hungry for Stink," they use no fuzz on the guitar and sing in a pretty voice that sounds like it could just as easily be Luscious Jackson as it could be L7.

But the flavor doesn't stop there. On "Freeway" it sounds like they used a Wal-mart keyboard for the drum beat and there's even a sampled girl voice that says "check, check, check it out" and a deep guy voice that interjects things like "peace!" and "do it! do it!" followed by zany robo sounds. The song is weird yet catchy and if they didn't say "fuck" so many times in it I'd say it could be a radio hit. Maybe it still can, rap songs are, I guess.

By the album's swan song, "Mantra Down," it's obvious that despite the style changes, label changes and stints of stardom one thing remains the same — L7 is still one tough-ass rock and roll band in every sense of the word.

— Jason Hardy