

THE DAILY TEXAN

LIFE&ARTS

Friday, September 26, 2008

MOVIE REVIEWS

Ben McKenzie stars in powerful drama

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Ben McKenzie should no longer be remembered as "that cute blonde guy from 'The OC.'" Instead, people should think of him as the actor who gives a stunning performance as a disabled war veteran in "Johnny Got His Gun."

The film is based on the book by Dalton Trumbo and tells the story of Joe Bonham, a 20-year-old World War I veteran who was hit with an artillery shell on the last day of the final battle. Joe survives, but doctors are forced to amputate all four of his limbs, as well as his eyes, ears, mouth and nose. Although his body is nothing more than a shell, Joe retains the ability to think and reason.

The film takes place entirely inside Joe's head with minimal props and scenery. Basically, the movie consists of McKenzie delivering a 70-minute monologue about his character's life before, during and after the war. Imagine watching a one-man play in which a wooden chair and bench are the only objects on stage. Now add in some lighting and smoke effects, and you should have a

pretty good idea about what it's like to watch this movie.

The entire production crew consisted of three people, making "Johnny Got His Gun," the epitome of an indie film. The only special effects are accomplished through the use of creative lighting and cinematography. The fact that the movie delivers such a strong anti-war message without showing any gore or battle scenes is impressive.

If this film sounds like it's on the depressing side, it is. Joe is essentially trapped inside himself with no hope of ever recovering, reliving memories of his father and fiancée knowing that he'll never be able to see them again.

Ultimately, this movie had the potential to be melodramatic and would have been if not for such a strong performance from McKenzie. He takes the audience on a roller coaster ride, portraying emotions from complete hopelessness to a faint sense of optimism. Even if you mocked "The O.C." in high school, you still have to appreciate the progress he's made as an actor.

"Johnny Got His Gun" opens today at the Dobie Theater.