

Snow Angels

reviewed by [John Petrakis](#) in the [May 20, 2008](#) issue



David Gordon Green's *Snow Angels* begins with the discordant sounds of a small-town high school band practicing on a football field under gray skies. It ends with the angry cry of a heartbroken grandmother calling to her dog from a back porch. In between, we become acquainted with intertwining tales of lust and romance, each at different stages of development or demise, which illustrate how glorious and painful declarations of love can be.

Green is a southern filmmaker whose previous three movies (including the critically acclaimed *George Washington*) were quiet meditations on the difficulty of growing up and growing old. He has been heavily influenced by the great art filmmaker Terrence Malick, who has championed Green's work. Like Malick, Green tends to tie his stories to nature, urging us to appreciate the world his characters are surviving in.

Based on the 1994 novel by Stewart O'Nan, *Snow Angels* revolves around three couples in a small midwestern town who have crossed paths over the years. The key story centers on Annie Marchand (Kate Beckinsale), a waitress and mother who has recently separated from her husband, Glenn (Sam Rockwell). Annie's frustration with Glenn's lack of ambition, together with his worsening drinking problem, led to the split. Glenn is lost and adrift without his wife and daughter, and he is willing to do anything to win them back, ignoring Annie's entreaties that it is time for both of

them to move on. This desire to fill the rapidly expanding hole in his life leads Glenn to some desperate and stupid acts.

Working with Annie at the Chinese restaurant is Arthur Parkinson (Michael Angarano), a shy high school student who once was babysat by Annie and who has long had a crush on her. That innocent longing is soon replaced by more complex emotions when he meets Lila Raybern (Olivia Thirlby), a bespectacled “art geek” who sees past Arthur’s wall of shyness and hopes to convince him that they would make a couple. The quiet scenes of the two of them getting to know each other are among the best in the film.

Arthur is frightened of a close relationship, and one reason is that his parents, Don and Louise (Griffin Dunne and Jeannetta Arnette), are in the midst of an ugly separation. They try to spare Arthur the anger of the breakup, giving him the “this has nothing to do with you” speech, but their bile spills onto him whenever he’s at home.

As these three stories of love and loss whirl around, various subplots are tossed in, including one involving Glenn’s decision to be “born again.” There is also a smidgen of comedy, mostly involving Barb (Amy Sedaris), another waitress at the restaurant, and Annie’s dim-witted boyfriend (Nicky Katt).

Though a story about relationships and the difficulty of holding them together, *Snow Angels* also portrays the key role of family. As this theme becomes more pronounced, we are thrust back to the first scene in the movie, in which the eccentric band teacher, Mr. Chervenick (Tom Noonan), chides his slovenly band members and reminds them that unless they work together as a unit, chaos and disappointment will ensue. (The theme-establishing voice-over resembles the beginning of *No Country for Old Men*.)

Snow Angels appears slight on the surface, but its actions and emotions run deep and wide. It has elements of Greek tragedy and reminders of how love can be lost with a single misstep.