Student Center feature presentation: ‘Signs’

By Brian Kibble
Staff Writer

A year after the slow-paced Unbreakable, M. Night Shyamalan returns to the big screen with Signs, a clever suspense/horror movie about faith, and losing it, that also brings back the fear from horror movies of old.

Signs is the story of Father Graham Hess (Mel Gibson) who wakes up one morning to find large crop circles in his cornfield. Believing local troublemakers are the culprits, Hess informs Officer Paski (Cherry Jones), who in turn describes weird events happening around their hometown in Bucks County, Pa.

Hess, along with his two children, Morgan and Bo (played by Rory Culkin and Abigail Breslin, respectively) and brother Merrill (Joaquin Phoenix of Gladiators), begin to see weird events, mainly crop circles, appearing everywhere around the globe. While his family believes something is happening with these events, Hess remains skeptical, mostly due to his lost faith. After losing his wife in a car accident, Hess left the church, and his faith, behind.

As the movie progresses, Hess begins to believe something truly odd and frightening is happening, and his faith is put to the ultimate test.

The acting in Signs is top notch. Gibson plays the family patriarch as he deals with the problems of the death of a loved one, raising the family, and trying to protect them, even though at first he does not share their belief in what is going on, with the ease of an experienced actor. Phoenix plays the younger brother of Hess and gives a great performance. The children are excellent and act as if they have been doing so for years. It would be hard to imagine anyone else playing these roles.

M. Night Shyamalan does a wonderful job directing for his third major movie. Although he still has a slow moving pace for the movie comparable with The Sixth Sense, it is not as slow as Unbreakable and manages to keep the audience spellbound throughout the entire show, which runs for one hour and 45 minutes, with rarely a dull moment. The directing keeps the audience involved in the story, on the edge of their seats, and at times, jumping out of them.

An eerie score composed by James Newton Howard (The Fugitives) helps the movie. The best and most effective tool the film uses to scare the audience is its use of a person’s imagination. Like the early horror films of the 1930s and 40s, such as Dracula and Frankenstein, Signs does not give the audience more than a mere shadow or a sound at times to scare people. This tactic requires a person’s imagination to help fill in what is not seen, but in a good way.

Signs is truly one of the best films of the year. A solid story and a return to the imagination-provoking styles of yesteryear, makes it one of the scariest movies in recent memory.