



by Suzanna Caldwell

‘The Messenger’ isn’t perfect, but a step toward greater things

If a messenger from God came to Earth, would you listen to them?

That’s the question “The Messenger” asks. The film is a collaboration between the University of Alaska Fairbanks theater department and film program. As such, it was created to serve as a marketing and educational tool for the department, now unofficially known as the department of theater and film.

While “The Messenger” is not a perfect product, it is successful in showing what the new film program is capable of creating. By pulling on the strengths of both groups — solid acting from the theater, strong composition from film — “The Messenger” is a successful amalgamation of the two groups housed with in the same department.

Carrie Baker stars as Jessie, a talk show host based in Burbank, Calif. Her show is clearly a hit, and the network she works for is looking for big ratings from a live special featuring her interviewing a man named Michael (Andrew Cassel) who claims to be an angel.

Baker, an assistant professor of performance in the theatre department, is dynamic and compelling in the role. Her character deals with extraordinary challenges, and she conveys her internal strife well. Because of it, her character’s breakthrough in the last act is even more powerful.

Cassel, as Michael, is a little too stiff to be appreciated as an angel sent from God. The film explains that Michael’s form is “not static,” that he can take any form needed to get his message across. In some ways you can understand his stilted delivery, as if he wasn’t comfortable with his new form. But after 20 minutes, it is a tiresome act. You’d have to wonder if an angel from God, someone who has apparently been watching man since its creation, would have a better grasp of modern-day human interactions.

The language at times is dense and heavy, which might be a limitation of the scenario. Religious language is not exactly known for being terse. Some editing is also a little abrupt and the sound is occasionally echoing or distant.

The crew worked hard to make Fairbanks look like California, shooting last summer before the snow fell. They do a decent job, although birch and spruce trees are apparent in certain shots. Also, in a town as small as Fairbanks, it’s hard not to watch the film and not immediately recognize locations. With luck, outsiders will view the film with a less meticulous eye.

“The Messenger” is clearly a labor of love for the film program and theater department. While it has some flaws, it’s obvious that it’s a stepping stone and worth seeing, if just to get an idea of what’s to come.



Photo by Kade Mendelowitz A scene from “The Messenger,” a film produced by the UAF film program and theater department. Carrie Baker, left, plays talk show host Jessie, while Andrew Cassel plays Michael, the supposed messenger sent from God