

## Bittersweet Chaos

Jason Orley's coming-of-age comedy *Big Time Adolescence* tackles the heartbreak of friendship through glimmering mundanity



Pictured, from left, Pete Davidson as Zeke and Griffin Gluck as Mo in *Big Time Adolescence*.

By: Grace Keegan

Lifelessness— like all the color was sucked out of the world— is the kickstart to the unrelenting, disheartening haze that is the Pete Davidson-led coming-of-age tale, *Big Time Adolescence*. The opening scene of the film introduces us to our supposed protagonist with a close-up shot of an exhausted-looking sixteen-year-old boy, Monroe Harris (known as “Mo”), apathetically awaiting his demise. Before getting a glimpse of the police calling for Mo, the almost meaningless shots of the surrounding art in the classroom make us feel as though

someone had brought the exposure way down—kind of like when I want my Instagram photos to look less vibrant, more mundane.

The origin of Zeke and Mo's friendship (played by Pete Davidson and Griffin Gluck, respectively): Zeke was Mo's older sister's high school boyfriend, and the admiration began there. Endearing by a nostalgic clip of Mo as a young kid crashing his big sister's movie date with Zeke, I found myself warming up to Davidson's character, despite his stereotypical vulgarity and drug-dealer vibe. Though Mo is arguably too young to hear it, Zeke refuses to limit his profanity around Mo, something no one else does. Zeke treats him like an adult; he treats him like a friend.

Though many of Zeke's interactions feature Davidson's classic quips, and Gluck follows suit, I can't help but watch this film with an ever-present melancholy. The only way I know how to describe it is that the entire film feels achingly overcast—all signs point to a thunderstorm, one that you know is coming and all you can do is wait for that first crack of lightning. The messiness of it all perfectly encapsulates the dynamic between Zeke and Mo. After Mo's sister dumps Zeke in high school, Mo innocently asks if they can still hang out. A half-hearted attempt at a "no" from Zeke insinuates that he actually cares about Mo, despite their seven-year age difference. Mo grows up around Zeke, whose life has remained stagnant and undeveloped since we first met him. At sixteen and much to the dislike of his parents, Mo begins to drink and spend all of his time with Zeke's friends, a group of tatted-up, aimless twenty-somethings who all treat him as an equal.

The film is glittered with poignant memories of a pure friendship that I want so badly to overshadow Zeke's blaring red flags as a role model, and a friend. Slow-motion shots and carefully selected music romanticize the friendship, much like the way Mo views their connection. The film almost feels as though it lacks a plot—that we are just spectators to "The

Zeke Show,” as Mo calls Zeke’s overbearing personality and lack of decorum. We watch Mo blindly follow Zeke’s ill advice all because he idolizes him. Throughout the film, Mo begins to sell alcohol and drugs to his peers at parties, ghost the girl he likes, and get a wildly irresponsible tattoo (none of which he felt good about doing). Knowing the feeling of wanting approval, it pains me to watch Mo cherish a friendship that diminishes his happiness. All of the good moments are simply bittersweet.

The breaking point of the film is when Mo sneaks out to sell drugs at a party, and the cops show up to find him. While driving by the neighborhood, Zeke notices a cop car and decides to follow it, instinctually wanting to look out for Mo. Mo’s priority at this point is rekindling things with the girl he likes, after realizing Zeke’s advice has only gotten him in trouble. Unfortunately, the cops corner him in the upstairs bedroom of the house, and in order to escape, he jumps out the window into the pool, where again we are greeted with a slow-motion shot and Connie Francis’ song “Where The Boys Are,” as all of the drugs float up around him. Suddenly, Mo is pulled out of the water by none other than Zeke, whose attempt at being a savior only half makes up for causing the problem in the first place. As the cops chase them out of the yard, Zeke picks Mo up, throws him over his shoulder, carries him out, and drives him home.

With only about ten minutes left in the film at this point and an absolutely certain downfall in the cards for Mo, we are flashed back quickly to happy moments in his and Zeke’s friendship, forcing us to digest the messiness of their dynamic. Though neither wanted to give up the friendship, Zeke had no direction, and he was holding Mo back. Mo’s sister described their relationship as one where both of them needed the other to feel cool, one of the worst (but not uncommon) foundations for a friendship. After getting in trouble with the police and his parents,

Mo doesn't see Zeke anymore. Months go by, and they run into one another at Zeke's fast food job. Zeke asks to hang out, but Mo brushes it off.

The film ends with an extended shot of Mo driving off, deadpan, while we see Zeke slowly fade away through the rear window of the car. The end of an era: Mo leaves Zeke behind forever. While seemingly a clean break, I find that every time I watch the film I am left with a messy, unresolved longing for a happy ending for them, a yearning for them to have a healthy friendship. Painfully mundane, *Big Time Adolescence* reflects the chaos of friendship and the under-recognized hurt of moving on to something better.