

# A Serious Man: Celebrating 25 Years of Coen Brothers!

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A Review by

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It's been 25 years since the Coen Brothers introduced their first indie classic, "Blood Simple" to much critical acclaim. This week's column covers some history of their work and their latest offering.

Henry: Few filmmakers have the ability, as well as the opportunity, to make uniquely different films on a regular basis. While most directors could be placed into one genre, Joel and Ethan Coen have proven to be the exception to the rule. The brothers have created 14 films that span the continuum from comedies ("Raising Arizona," "Intolerable Cruelty") to dark thrillers ("No Country for Old Men," "Fargo"). Each film has a distinct style and rhythm that could be identified as a "Coen brothers" piece, but still stand on its own as an original.

Sims: It is exactly that style, writing, as well as their indie roots have long been an inspiration to aspiring independent filmmakers everywhere (including myself) "Fargo" garnered the first Oscar for the brothers who won for best screenplay in 1997, and there was no doubt as to why. They were nominated for best direction but lost to "The English Patient," which some still wonder why (oh, please don't write me any nasty letters--just ask Elaine from "Seinfeld"! ). They would gain another nomination for the adaptation for another of their classics, "O Brother, Where Art Thou," but wouldn't again take home the Oscar until 2008 with their big win with "No Country for Old Men" (best film, best direction, best writing).

Henry: Their latest film, "A Serious Man" takes place in 1967 and follows Larry Gopnik, an angst-ridden Jewish professor. Gopnik's life is crumbling around him; his wife is leaving him, his children are having discipline issues and a student at his school is trying to bribe him. The parable of the film asks the question – when a man is at the lowest point in his life, where should he turn? The film is quirky (a good thing) and mixes humor with sadness as we witness a man who falling apart. Michael Stuhlbarg stars as Gopnik and he plays the part wonderfully. In the end, it is not exactly a "feel-good" movie, but that is the point.

Sims: Exactly. Not a typical Hollywood ending but most certainly fitting. Some may have other Coen Brothers favorites, but this one is beautifully written with brilliant acting especially from relative newcomer Stuhlbarg (another endearing trademark for the brothers to give a relative newbie the chance), excellent cinematography, and great moments of depth that these two pull off so well. We're looking forward to the next 25 years!

We hope you can join us in celebrating independent filmmaking in keeping with the standard set by the Coen Brothers at this year's Cape May Film Festival, November 20-22, 2009. Visit [www.capemayfilm.org](http://www.capemayfilm.org) for details or call 609-884-6700.

