



Islands not a land of unicorns

Islands

With *The Ride Theory* and *The Besnard Lakes*
 Tuesday, 31 October at 7pm
 Starlite Room

PAUL BLINOV
 Arts & Entertainment Staff

Nick Diamonds is haunted by the shadows of his past. The popularity of his defunct bare-bones pop band, the Unicorns, has been stalking him since their messy breakup in 2004.

When MP3s of his new brainchild, Islands, came into being, the comparisons were swift and frequent, unaided by the band's choice to reinterpret some old Unicorns songs on their first

release to the world. But much like the mythical creature, such juxtapositions have been debunked, thanks to Island's constant touring and the release of their dreamy pop album *Return to the Sea*. Indeed, things are starting to change.

"It's a slow process, but it's definitely happening," Diamonds explains with regards to separating his old band from the new and improved Islands. "I think once we put out another record, it'll make us even more obvious, and stand alone that much more [from the Unicorns]."

Since its inception, Islands has swollen too much larger proportions than your average band. Its large cast of musicians currently includes multi-

instrumentalists Patrick Gregorie, Alex Chow and Sebastian Chow, bassist Patrice Agoboku, violinist Kate Perkins and percussionist Aaron Harris.

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While this might seem musically indulgent, Diamonds insists that

having such a large group of musicians is a blessing, not a curse.

"[Having so many members] makes it sound a lot more interesting and fluid and full," he says. "Also, on a purely personal level, it makes things nice because there's a lot of different people to focus your energy on. You never really get tired of anyone because you can always go have out with someone else and you never really feel to boxed in."

Diamonds places extra emphasis on developing relationships within the group, especially since inter-band conflicts tore the Unicorns—which was only a three-piece—apart. However, the latest additions to the group came at the expense of

Diamond's long-time friend and fellow Unicorn alumnus, drummer Jamie Thompson.

Thompson, tired of playing in a band, left Islands in the middle of their well-received tour opening up for Metric. The loss of such a band member could have been a killing blow to such a young band, but according to Diamonds, the transition period was remarkably smooth. The band picked up Harris and continued on, undaunted, into a European tour. Now touring North America yet again, Islands are proving themselves to be a band of unquenchable ambition. Diamonds seems to think such touring zeal is vital to meshing as a band.

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Snippets of the unordinary

Running With Scissors portrays Augusten Burroughs' chaotic and quirky life

Running With Scissors

Directed by Ryan Murphy
 Starring Annette Benning, Joseph Cross, Brian Cox, Joseph Fiennes, Evan Rachel Wood, Alec Baldwin and Gwyneth Paltrow
 Empire Theatres
 Now Playing

DIANA SONG
 Arts & Entertainment Writer

Running with scissors: it's not exactly the safest of activities, and it's not something you see people doing everyday. But then again, the film *Running With Scissors* isn't about ordinary people or ordinary lives. In fact, it's steeped in weirdness and crazy situations. Unfortunately, this also sort of poses a problem.

Based on the popular memoir by Augusten Burroughs, *Running With Scissors* is about Burroughs, or, more specifically, his early teenage years. Burroughs' mother, Dierdre, is mentally unstable and a struggling poet, and his father is an absent alcoholic. After his parents' divorce, Burroughs is sent off to live with his mother's therapist, Dr Finch (played to great comic effect by Brian Cox), but unfortunately,

Dr Cox isn't all there himself; his family is even more dysfunctional than Burroughs'. Thrust into a disturbing and strange new reality, Burroughs must cope with what he gets, and try to maintain his sanity in a place where sanity doesn't even seem to exist.

Running With Scissors is an odd film, which is inevitable, considering its plot and zany characters. The utter quirkiness works itself in, lending the film a degree of humour that becomes the main reason for its entertaining qualities. The jokes are dark and dry, and most of them come with the baggage of disturbing situations—such as Augusten's affair with a 33-year-old man who also happens to be a schizophrenic. Still, you still can't help but laugh at the witty dialogue.

Although the quirkiness helps the film by adding hilarity, it's also the reason for the movie's downfall. Most of the characters feel one-dimensional and underdeveloped, as if they're nothing but crazy cardboard cutouts placed strategically to provoke laughs. The actors shed tears at the blink of an eye, but since everything seems to be happening in a weird, other dimension that has nothing to do with the world the rest of us live in, most of

the dramatic scenes fail to arouse any kind of emotion. It's a shame, because theoretically there's a lot in the movie that's capable of drawing empathy from the viewers.

The acting is another problem. While most of the cast does nicely with what they're given (which isn't much), they seem to be simply enjoying the ride, and fail at giving their characters any kind of real depth. Really, the only actor who pulls off a praiseworthy job is Annette Bening (Deirdre). She lights up the screen every time she appears, and brings fire and heart to her insane role.

In the end, the film itself is, in a way, running with scissors. It gives off a sense of being dangerously off-balance, and that it could accidentally cut itself at any given moment. And by the time the credits start rolling down the screen, you can't help but feel that the movie's come out all tattered, with shallow self-inflicted cuts covering every inch of its surface.

Running With Scissors is funny, depressing and trying way too hard to be weird. Watch it if you like quirkiness, but if you're looking for some depth at the same time, you might want to stay away.

