

le her bellybutton from the inside and she gasps in pleasure at his newfound effrontery, the humiliations he has gone through seem worth it. Of course, *Youth in Revolt*—like all the movies in this genre—is a straight-male fantasia. The hope is that women directors will come along and show horny boys the power of what they're up against—along with the anxieties that, despite *la différence*, they have in common.

JOSHUA GOLDIN's debut feature, *Wonderful World*, is a thesis drama, which means it comes to a philosophical point—which further means it's easy to dismiss as too messagey. But its thesis isn't pat. It doesn't reduce its characters' motives—it illuminates their contradictions. Matthew Broderick plays Ben Singer, a former musician (he made records for kids) who's soured on the business and burned his bridges. Poor, divorced, working as a proofreader, he sees a culture that caters to people's worst instincts, a culture he wants no part of. His negativity has infected his young daughter (Jodelle Ferland) to the point where she hides from him; his ex-wife (Ally Walker) says, "She still wants to think the world is a nice place." Only Ben's Senegalese flat-mate Ibu (Michael K. Williams) offers a convincing counterargument. Over chess games he invariably wins, he talks about game theory, and its suggestion that people can act in ways both opportunistic and moral.

Game theory, at least as articulated here, is a pretty good way to approach the world without becoming either a spokes-

man for mindless positive thinking or a David Mamet-like cynic given to parables of betrayal and one-upmanship. And it's a great way to survive Hollywood. When Ibu goes into a diabetic coma and his sister (Sanaa Lathan) arrives from Senegal, Ben falls in love and mounts a vindictive lawsuit against the city. Like a child, he both overidealizes and overblames. What's fascinating about Broderick is how quickly he went from the can-do juvenile of *WarGames* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* to the sad-sack embodiment of middle-aged defeat. But maybe he was so inspiring in his youth because you could glimpse the future worrywart. His rapport with Ferland is remarkable—and so is she, her confusion about what to make of the dad she loves right on the surface.

A lot of *Wonderful World* doesn't jell, and Williams, who played Omar on *The Wire*, sports an accent so convincing you get only every third word—although maybe that's a plus, considering his didactic lines. But the movie is unfailingly likable and finally impressive. Goldin doesn't settle for easy answers, and he makes you think that no one should.

THERE'S NO serious drama to speak of in *The Last Station*, which centers on the final days of Tolstoy (Christopher Plummer) as two momentous forces compete for the rights to his life's work: his wife

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