



Mercedes McCambridge stars in Marsha Norman's "night, Mother," which continues at the Birmingham Theatre through Oct. 21. Performances are at 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, 7 p.m. Sundays, and 2 p.m. Wednesdays and Sundays. For ticket information, call 844-8225.

## Little matter in 'night, Mother'

By Barbara Michals  
special writer

### review

Though acted to perfection and certainly thought-provoking, "night, Mother," the Pulitzer Prize-winning drama at the Birmingham Theatre, is not totally satisfying.

As the audience watches a young woman methodically prepare for her suicide, one expects to gain something from the experience, to leave the theater with some insightful response to the tragedy. That just doesn't happen here.

ONE NIGHT Jessie Cates (Phyllis Somerville) casually announces to her mother (Mercedes McCambridge) that she intends to shoot herself there and then. In the next hour-and-a-half the two women do some soul-baring, but there are no intense revelations.

Despite living under the same roof, the relationship was a shallow one; eventually there is some understanding, but it matters little.

Jessie's problems are numerous: a deserting husband, a delinquent son, a self-centered mother and degrading epileptic seizures. By evening's end she knows a little more about her husband, her illness and her dead father, but the news only strengthens her resolve.

Jessie isn't having a very good time, and suicide is the one clear, independent statement she can make with her life.

QUIET AND RECLUSIVE by nature, Jessie married because her mother found a husband for her. She believed he left because he couldn't stand her seizures.

Epilepsy prevents her from holding a job or driving a car. She has moved back with her mother, who enjoys having Jessie look after her.

The seizures, which her mother insists on calling "fits," leave her humiliated. And her mother either unnecessarily sends her to the hospital by am-

balance, or summons her married brother to haul her into the bedroom. "Forgive me, I thought you belonged to me," Jessie's mother laments, when forced to confront Jessie's longing for freedom.

SOMERVILLE'S STRENGTH is that her Jessie seems very normal, very rational; she neither looks nor sounds a loser. As the eminently practical Jessie goes about her preparations, Somerville's spurs of ebullience contrast effectively with her inner despair.

As the mother, McCambridge's expressive face and magnificent vocal inflections cover a wide spectrum of emotional responses.

Describing herself as "a simple country woman," Thelma Cates cannot cope with the present crisis any more than she could cope with Jessie's seizures over the years. She's not a bad mother, just not a particularly good one.

Despite the right intentions, Thelma's appeals for Jessie's life seem to be for all the wrong reasons. Ineffective at all most everything, her one physical scuffle to deter Jessie is pathetically inadequate.

PLAYWRIGHT MARSHA NORMAN'S dialogue is consistently interesting, and liberal doses of humor save the play from morbidity.

Director Tom Moore's pacing is smooth. Performing the play without intermission intensifies the mood, and Kenneth Evans' lighting also enhances the dramatic effect.

As exemplified by the callous brother whose annual Christmas gift to Jessie is a slipper in the wrong size, Jessie's tragedy is that no one ever cared quite enough about her.

Unfortunately "night Mother" may leave the viewer feeling much the same way despite the fine production.

## what's at the movies

**ALL OF ME (PG).** Carl Reiner's latest, greatest comedy, with Steve Martin and Lily Tomlin.

**ANOTHER COUNTRY (Unrated).** Adapted from British stage hit about politics and homosexuality in an English boys school.

**CAREFUL, HE MIGHT HEAR YOU (PG).** Australian film exploring the bitter struggle between two sisters to gain possession of young boy whose mother died in childbirth.

**C.H.U.D. (R).** That's an acronym for Canabaltic Humanoid Underground Dwellers. Need we say more?

**THE EVIL THAT MEN DO (R).** Charles Bronson in story of man's vengeance when the system fails.

**EXTERMINATOR 2 (R).** Sounds like a terrible film of revenge with a cast of unknowns.

**GHOST BUSTERS (PG).** Billy Murray, Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis as parapsychology research students trying to rid New York of menacing ghosts.

**GREMLINS (PG).** Technically well-done story of exotic pet whose offspring turn mean. Hoyt Axton, Zach Galligan and Phoebe Cates in a Spielberg film too gross for the under-12 set.

**IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES (PG).** Drew Barrymore, Shelley Long and Ryan O'Neal in engaging story of family problems.

**PURPLE RAIN (R).** Another rock music film with family problems mixed in. Features Prince and Apollonia Kotero.

**REVENGE OF THE NEERDS (R).** Tasteless, colorless college comedy.



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**MOVIE RATING GUIDE**  
G General audiences. All ages admitted.  
PG Parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for pre-teens.  
PG-13 Parents are strongly cautioned to give special guidance for attendance of children under 13. Some material may be inappropriate for young children.  
R Restricted. Under 18 requires accompanying parent or guardian.  
X No one under 18 admitted.

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## 'Way Down East' at DIA

"Way Down East," the 1920 D.W. Griffith-directed, feature-length film starring Lillian Gish, will be shown by the Detroit Institute of Arts' Afternoon Film Theatre at 1 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday, Oct. 7, in the museum's recital hall.

Tickets at \$1 will be available at the door only. Information about group rates may be obtained by calling the museum ticket office at 833-2730.

Adapted from a stage melodrama, the film follows the woes of a young woman as she is tricked into a false marriage, is abandoned once she be-

comes pregnant, and watches her baby die in her arms.

Once her past is revealed to the wealthy young man she comes to love, and the romance fades, the film arrives at the only destination 1919 morality permitted — the famous scene with Gish, not a stout person, being swept away on a real ice floe toward the crashing water falls during a raging blizzard.

This Afternoon Film Theatre series, "The Movies, Mr. Griffith and Lillian Gish," will continue through mid-November. For a detailed schedule, call the DIA ticket office during regular business hours.