

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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(Wb, T, Ro-XO)C

## Play-into-film likely to garner Oscars

"Children of a Lesser God" (R) has many marvelous qualities and is, indeed, a major motion picture in the very best sense of the term.

Based on Mark Medoff's 1979-80 triple-Tony-Award-winning Broadway play (Best Play, Actor and Actress), "Children of a Lesser God" is the best film I've seen so far this year and ought to win six or more Oscars.

James Leeds (William Hurt) is an innovative teacher of the deaf who has just been employed by the Governor Kittredge School for the Deaf on the remote coast of northern Maine. The school's superintendent, Dr. Curtis Franklin (Philip Bosco), maintains a steadily but conservative institution.

Friction develops as James reaches out to his hearing-impaired students and inspires them, to learn — among other things — to speak and, thereby, communicate in the most complete sense of the word. Leeds is not content with the conventional wisdom that sign language is suffi-

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cient communication for the hearing-impaired.

TENSION ALSO develops as James Leeds tries to communicate with a lovely, but angry, young deaf girl, Sarah Norman (Marlee Matlin), a Governor Kittredge graduate who has stayed on to work as a school janitor. Much of Sarah's anger stems from her early home life and her family's reaction to her impairment. She and her mother (Piper Laurie) are estranged.

"Children of a Lesser God" is about the very tender, passionate and compassionate love affair that



James Leeds (William Hurt) is a teacher of the deaf who has a tender affair with Sarah (Marlee Matlin), one of the students at the school where he teaches, in "Children of a Lesser God."

develops between James and Sarah. It is about the problems of the hearing-impaired and the profoundly deaf. But most significantly, it is about the problems of communication between and among human beings.

"Children of a Lesser God" is a great movie because it effectively deals with those issues and touches our sensibilities with the warmth and beauty of the very best of the human spirit, the ability to rise above the seemingly impossible barriers life presents.

The film's complicated and difficult objectives are met by a superb cast and a very fine production team. The decision to employ only hearing-impaired artists as deaf characters reflects the film's central concept, barriers to human communication, at every level, may be overcome.

Marlee Matlin suffered a severe

hearing loss from roseola when she was 18 months old. From 8 to 16 years she performed at the Children's Theatre of the Deaf. "Children of a Lesser God" is her film debut. Matlin is lovely to look at and inspiring to watch. Her ability to communicate emotion without reliance on words is profound.

SEVEN YOUNG performers, who range from hard-of-hearing to profoundly deaf, play the teenage students in William Hurt's class. Additionally, the production features the deaf actress Linda Bove and other hearing-impaired talent. To expedite communication on the set, signers were on duty during the production. Paramount is distributing more captioned prints of "Children of a Lesser God" than any previous film released by any studio.

But most significantly, the production integrates signing in the film's

the movies

**Dan Greenberg**

fabric, largely through William Hurt's magnificent performance as he "speaks" for the deaf, and for himself, by vocalizing his signing and theirs as well.

In his seventh motion picture, Hurt again demonstrates his great talent and easily equals his multiple award-winning performance in last year's "Kiss of the Spider Woman."

The film's photography by Australian John Seale ("Careful, He Might Hear You") has a dark, somber quality as if the damp and rocky coast of Maine were physically characterizing the inner turmoil impaired people suffer in communicating.

Actually, the film was shot in Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, not far north of where the story is set.

THE SIGNIFICANCE of the film, and its tremendous impact, is that it deals with barriers to all human communication, not just those of the impaired. It takes just as much courage and understanding to rise above the barriers of noise as it does to surmount the walls of silence.

Together, James and Sarah learn to bridge those gaps. It is one thing to say but a far greater task to accomplish on film. Matlin and Hurt have done so in a fine script by playwright Mark Medoff working with Heper Anderson. The crowning touch is the sensitive direction by Randa Haines ("Something About Amelia").

All told, "Children of a Lesser God" is the movie of the year, one which offers audiences great warmth and pleasure.

## Meadow Brook selling costumes from shows

Items of apparel worn onstage by stars who have appeared at Meadow Brook Theatre will be sold at an upcoming costume sale.

Just a few of these are the raincoat Tom Bray ("Ripside") wore in "Dames at Sea," the gown Polly Howles (Inspector 12 in the Haines underwear commercials) wore in "Ring Round the Moon," the Panama hat Academy-Award-winner William Hurt wore in "Man and Superman," and the ghost gown Cheryl Glanville (original cast of Tony-Award-winning "I'm Not Rappaport") wore in "Blithe Spirit."

From doublets to tutus, hundreds of costumes from the last 15 seasons at Meadow Brook go on sale from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 18, in the lobby of the theater at Oakland University in Rochester Hills. The sale is open to the public.

Meadow Brook Theatre Guild, the

**Prices range from 50 cents for some accessories to \$100 — with prices on most gowns, coats and suits averaging \$10.**

sale's sponsor, has sent letters notifying drama teachers at area high schools of the sale.

Prices range from 50 cents for some accessories to \$100 with prices on most gowns, coats and suits averaging \$10.

The costumes represent thousands of dollars in labor and material, said costumer Mary Lynn Bonnell. "We build new costumes for each play, and we just don't have room to store them all."

## Music school opens

Center for Creative Studies-Institute of Music and Dance has opened a major branch at the International School, 13 Mile and Evergreen, Southfield.

Before its name change, the Institute was the Detroit Community Music School, formed in 1970 through the merger of the Detroit Settlement School and the Detroit Institute of Music Arts. The Institute affiliated with the Center for Creative Studies in 1984.

Courses in dance, music theory and music therapy will be added to the existing programs of Orff,

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The faculty includes members of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and Michigan Opera Theatre orchestra who hold degrees from schools such as Juilliard, Eastman, Indiana University, Northwestern and University of Michigan.

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