

THE WEEKEND

FRIDAY



Festival of Trees at Cobo Center in Detroit, open today 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. features 113 professionally designed trees and holiday vignettes. Call (313) 966-TREE for information.

SATURDAY



Jennifer Koh, a 20-year-old violinist, joins guest conductor James Paul and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra for an 8:30 p.m. performance at Orchestra Hall in Detroit, (313) 833-3700.

SUNDAY



Stagecrafters presents "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" 2 p.m. at the Baldwin Theatre, 415 South Lafayette, Royal Oak, (248) 541-6430.



Hot tip: Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village in Dearborn deck the halls and wafes during Traditions of the Season, Friday, Nov. 28 through Sunday, Jan. 4. This three-story holiday tree greets visitors inside the museum as they enter the Great Hall, (313) 271-1620.



ILLUSTRATION BY DUNN PICTURES

Family comedy: Professor Phillip Brainard, (Robin Williams) who has been working to create an alternative source of energy, accidentally creates a goo that looks like rubber but has amazing properties in "Flubber."

Remakes, sequels highlight holiday trips to the movies

BY JOHN MONAGHAN
SPECIAL WRITER

December 25 has long been a popular night at the movies.

"It's become a sort of family tradition," said one friend, more a casual moviegoer than fanatic. "Once the presents are exchanged and the dinner eaten, it's about the only thing open to do."

Hollywood, which routinely premieres movies on Christmas Day, is being especially accommodating this year. No less than nine movies bow, and though the ghosts of Christmas past have often capped the day with disappointment ("The Godfather Part III" and "Four Rooms" come to mind), we can only hope.

"Flubber" and "Alien Resurrection," which officially kick off the holiday season this weekend, pretty much sum up your choices in general: sequels and remakes with some original ideas thrown into the mix.

■ **"Flubber"** — A Disney remake of its own 1961 live-action comedy. Robin Williams fills the shoes of "My Three Sons" Fred MacMurray, whose absent-minded professor was first to invent the green goo that makes whatever it comes into contact with fly. (Opened Nov. 26)

■ **"Alien Resurrection"** — More than lead char-



ANDREW COOPER/RETNA/OUTLINE

On the set: Director Steven Spielberg (left) goes over a scene with Anthony Hopkins (center) and Morgan Freeman on the set of "Amistad."

acter Ripley died at the end of "Alien 3." Director David Fincher pretty much sank the franchise with his shaved-headed aesthetic and heavy-handed symbolism. French directors Jeunet and Caro (fresh from "Delicatessen" and "The City of

Lost Children") promise to breathe new life into the series, resurrecting star Sigourney Weaver and introducing Winona Ryder as a cyborg mechanic. (Opened Nov. 26)

■ **"Contempt"** — Martin Scorsese is behind the rerelease of this 1963 French film (also known as "Le Mepris"), the third and perhaps most accessible from experimental director Jean-Luc Godard. Here Jack Palance and Brigitte Bardot find themselves in the midst of marital troubles as he tries to pen the screenplay for a movie version of "The Odyssey." Fritz Lang, the genius behind "M" and "Metropolis," plays, appropriately, a director. (Playing Nov. 28-30 at the Detroit Film Theatre)

■ **"Amistad"** — Word is that it's no "Schindler's List," but Steven Spielberg still entertains while bringing to light a little discussed bit of history. The year is 1839 when 53 Africans take over the title vessel, a Spanish slave ship, and are put on trial in the United States. Matthew McConaughey plays a crusading young lawyer (again) while Anthony Hopkins depicts another American President, this time John Quincy Adams. (Opens Dec. 12)

■ **"For Richer or Poorer"** — Kirstie Alley and Tim Allen as a rich Manhattan couple, on the

Please see MOVIES, E2

THEATER

Ghost of Christmas past returns to Meadow Brook

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

Keep it simple. Keep it true to the original. Have a great actor in the lead role.

According to the Charles Nolte this is the secret to success when mounting a production of Charles Dickens' beloved "A Christmas Carol."

Nolte should know. After a three-year experiment of doing other versions, Meadow Brook Theatre is bringing back Nolte's adaptation with Nolte directing. Earlier this year, Meadow Brook artistic director Geoffrey Sherman admitted that popular sentiment favored the simple, faithful Nolte approach.

"It's nice to have your version remembered so fondly by people," Nolte said.

Nolte lives in Minneapolis where he divides his time between acting, writing and directing and teaching theater at the University of Minnesota. But Meadow Brook, on the campus of Oakland University, has become something of a second

A Christmas Carol

What: Charles Nolte's adaptation of Charles Dickens' famous story.

Where: Meadow Brook Theatre on the campus of Oakland University, Rochester

When: Friday, Nov. 28 to Sunday, Dec. 28. Performances 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Thursdays, 8 p.m. Fridays, 2, 6 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 8:30 p.m. Sundays.

Tickets: Range from \$23 to \$33.50 depending on performance day. Special family rates are available Nov. 28-30.

For tickets and information: (248) 377-3300.

home for Nolte.

"I'm delighted to be back. I've spent a good deal of time here. There are also so many who were in my version years ago, so it's deja vu all over again. It's a family reunion."

Dickens' immortal tale of a stingy man redeemed by ghosts has been a Nolte favorite for a long time.

"My generation remembers the

old radio show with Lionel Barrymore," he said. "And every year, my father made us sit down and listen to him read the story. So the story was familiar to me."

Nolte also remembers seeing the original MGM sound version in the 1930s which featured an eager, round-faced young boy as Tiny Tim. The boy was Terrence Kilbourne, who became artistic director at Meadow Brook. It was Kilbourne who asked Nolte to adapt the story.

"The challenge of converting 'Christmas Carol' to the stage isn't as great as you might think because Dickens thought in theatrical terms," Nolte said. "He was great monologist himself. He wrote in theatrical terms. Much of the dialogue in my play comes from the book because you can't improve on Dickens."

Dickens also gives the play a simple, clear structure with visits of Marley and three spirits leading to the redemption of Ebenezer Scrooge. Nolte said the story has a

natural shape to it as Scrooge deals with his past, compares his current misery to the warmth of those around him and confronts his possible future.

"The closer one gets to the original story is the way to go," Nolte said. "The problem at many theaters, such as the production at the Guthrie (in Minneapolis) is they draw in things that don't belong and aren't in the story. At the Guthrie, they bring on Charles Dickens but he's not in the story."

But keeping things simple doesn't mean ignoring the stories deeper meanings. Dickens is not all sweetness and light and Nolte said he wouldn't think of softening the later scenes of despicable slum life and haunting death.

"Admittedly the story is quite dark, it doesn't serve Dickens' purpose to pretty it up. It's a dark, dark scene. But immediately after the darkest scene comes the lightest when he is redeemed," Nolte



Fast friends: Booth Colman reprises his performance of Ebenezer Scrooge and Jeffrey Hyke (left) alternates the role of Tiny Tim with Jami-son Schrock (right).

Please see GHOST, E2