

# Arts & Entertainment



## POPCORN™ City by the Sea: Shore Is Mediocre

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER  
2 popcorns

Can a movie still entertain you despite a seen-it-before script, predictable direction and only average acting performances? You better believe it. If it were otherwise, there'd be no Hollywood. Take *City by the Sea*, a perfect example that also just happens to be the subject of this review.

A typical police melodrama, the film stars Robert De Niro as a good cop sandwiched between the legacy of a child-killing father and the anguish of a drug-addicted son, who also may be a killer. So there's the hook: father, son, murder, drugs, and a good old family curse to top it all off. Sounds like it could be genuinely interesting, n'est pas? Maybe it could have been — if it had a more inventive screenplay and some creative direction.

As it stands, director Michael Caton-Jones's Saturday night special of a movie earns only the distinction of being the latest De Niro flick — no more, no less. But thanks to packaging, that's enough to bring 'em in for a few weekends. Then there's the video revenue followed by the overseas profits. Truth be told, any more than that would have probably surprised the studio.

Now, of course we know that you wouldn't follow anything other than *Citizen Kane* (1941), *La Strada* (1954), *The African Queen* (1951) or any of their highbrow ilk to occupy the VCR in that cultural sanctuary known as your den. However, recently you couldn't help but overhear the servants talking about the latest "shoot 'em up" at the Tivoli, and rather excitedly at that.

Your interest is piqued. But much more importantly, perhaps you're the sort who feels the humbling experience of an occasional outing among the commoners will make you a better king or queen. In such case, venturing out to witness the iconic mediocrity of *City by the Sea* should serve your purpose.

Odds are, it'll even give you a greater appreciation of those classics you've confined yourself to over the years. Who knows? Maybe it'll even be fun. But don't forget: You're doing it for civilization.

Lest you are detected in your research venture at the cineplex, do as the Romans. Leave the Pierce Arrow home. Drive up in an SUV — the bigger the better. It's status. The SUV is to the suburbs what the pit bull is to the ghetto. It says you mean business. And the aggressive pose will put you in the mood for the gunplay that's about to be portrayed on the screen.

But make sure you're comfortable. To fit in with your newfound compatriots, a sweat suit and sneakers is the accepted uniform. Just to complete the picture, fill one of those plastic trays with a few jumbo boxes of popcorn, some 32-ounce Cokes, and a small mountain of those pretzels drenched in Cheez-Wiz.

Now, here's the coup de grace. Don't rush in. Wait until the theater's darkened and the movie's been on for about five minutes. Then stumble to your seats. You are fashionably late, and no one is the wiser.

Now that the atmosphere is set, welcome to Long Beach, N.Y., the town alluded to in the title. Heading from New York City to investigate a drug-connected murder that may have a link to the shore community, detective Vincent LaMarca (Robert De Niro) tells his partner Reg (George Dzundza) what a great place the burg was back in the day...when he used to live there.

Nostalgically, and not without a hint of sadness, he informs that this is where people bought their first home and had their first child. "It was all so fresh," he noted. The camera despairingly shows how that's all changed.

Pulling no sociological punches, the screen fills with sights of decay and squalor. And an interesting thing happens. Actually, it's a directorial trick. The visible facts immediately lend an air of credibility to the fiction. It's truth by association. It matters not that every other sentence from De Niro sounds more like a soliloquy than dialogue.

We're told it's loosely based on a true story. So loose that it barely resembles the *Esquire* article by Mike McAlary. But that's par for the course and has no bearing on how the film plays. Because despite exposition that can hardly be accused of being artistic or subtle and a level of predictability that completely permeates the story, we buy into the irony-filled cliché that serves as the plot.

In-between gun battles held in seedy back alleys and confrontations with parochial police captains who just won't let a cop do his job, we learn that this represents more than an assignment for the decorated gumshoe. Rather, it is an involuntary homecoming...and a sojourn to a past that LaMarca will be forced to relive before movie's end.

Not everyone knows that the detective's dad died in the electrical chair for murdering a child in the 1950s — the result of a botched kidnapping. But there are enough familiar with the tragic tale to make it uncomfortable whenever the story is recounted.

Hence his personal relationships, including a rather convenient affaire de coeur with downstairs neighbor Michelle (Frances McDormand), tend to be one-sided.

For example, the two have exchanged apartment keys and the intimacies that generally accompany such an accord. Yet, Michelle doesn't know that her

cop was once married, that he has a grown son, and that practically everything about Vincent LaMarca has been shaped by the experience of having an executed dad.

But recent events will be changing all that. When the boy he never knew is accused of one and then two murders, a parasitic press can't get enough of it. A *New York Post* headline queries: "Killer Gene?" Unfortunately, it's about the film's only bit of comedy relief.

Previously starved for information about her lover, like it or not Michelle now has no choice but to take a crash course in officer LaMarca. The \$64 question is, will she still like him after the shooting stops — that is, if he's alive?

But the cop will have to worry about that later. Because in typical Hollywood fashion, it's grand catharsis time for Vincent. All the tattered threads of his past are being rolled up into one ball: the shame of his father's death, his horribly unhappy marriage and the sadness of knowing nothing about his son (James Franco, doing a passable James Dean), who is at least a dope addict if not a cop killer. Oh, and guess which cop he did or didn't kill. 'C'mon, it's easy.

Regardless, the bottom line is, we've seen enough movies to know that maybe, just maybe, if Vincent can somehow help his son in this time of crisis, then broad-sweeping redemption will be his. In other words, except for one scene that sports an uncharacteristic twist, expect few surprises.

Still, originality isn't everything. Look at all the novel by-products of your experience among the great unwashed: the ride in the SUV, wearing a sweatshirt outside of the gym, and those cheese-covered pretzels. Mmmm.

More important, think how valuable *City by the Sea* could be to your career, especially if you're a CEO in these trying times. Precisely because it is so unmemorable, there is little chance its details will clutter your mind.

That's certainly something to consider if you think you'll be answering allegations about stock manipulation the next morning. But wear the Brooks Bros.

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*City by the Sea*, rated R, is a Warner Bros. release directed by Michael Caton-Jones and stars Robert De Niro, Frances McDormand and James Franco. Running time: 108 minutes.



GATHERING OF TALENT...Westfield artist Laura Williams, far left, joined her gifted peers, William Coombs of North Plainfield and Lorrie Baldwin of Piscataway during an artists reception held at the Watchung Arts Center on September 8. Williams was awarded first prize for her professional mixed media piece, "Keep It Real" during the Art on the Green event in Dunellen.

## Pen & Ink

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

front of them. The minister's son, who married outside of his faith, was oddly absent from the season's first epiphanies, which makes no sense since he was so pivotal in the finale. The brood has blossomed, still sweetly testing the boundaries of their angelic parents, who are trying to do everything in their Earthly power to prevent their downfall.

Comical as it is, 7th Heaven has a habit of keeping viewers on its toes, often on its knees in prayer, and is also a fine example of how a family doesn't have to be perfect in order to find its silver lining.

The WB, whether it realizes it or not, thumbs its nose at "The Big Three" this season because there is no kowtowing to factors of fear, the awkward cohabitation of strangers or the overdone angst of situation sitcoms. Now, if only I can convince my doctor to forgo my copays, all will be well with the world.

## Daurio, Strickland Perform In Summer's Rome Festival

WESTFIELD — After winning a competitive national audition, Julie Daurio and Martha Strickland, both singers from Westfield, performed as featured artists at the Rome Festival in Rome, Italy this summer.

With instrumentalists, singers, ballet dancers and graphic artists from nine different countries, Daurio and Strickland performed major works at a concert site approximately 900 meters from the Colosseum.

The young singers participated in the Young Artists in Rome Festival Program and performed in Donizetti's masterpiece opera, *L'Elisir d'amore* and a recital.

Regarding their performances, Maestro Fritz Maraffi, Musical Director of the Rome Festival Orchestra and Opera, stated, "The singers from Westfield upheld the high standard of performing what Italian music lovers, tourists, and critics have come to expect from the Rome Festival."

Daurio and Strickland also studied with master artist-teachers as part of the Festival's Summer Institute, which is sponsored by the Rome Festival Orchestra, Ltd., an equal opportunity American Educational Charity.

Strickland has studied voice for over three years, most recently with Maestra Ginger Haselden of Edison. She received support for her expenses of living in Rome from local donors and the Alumni Fund of the Rome Festival Orchestra, Ltd.

Daurio continues to study voice with Maestra Jeannette Maraffi of American Performance Studios in Mountainside. She received support for her expenses of living in Rome from local individual and business donors, as well as the Young Artists' Fund of the Orchestra.

Both Daurio and Strickland had the opportunity to see the sights of Rome, while accompanied by volunteers from the state.

## Kindermusik Registration Now Underway at Calderone School

SPRINGFIELD — The Calderone School of Music in East Hanover and Springfield is currently accepting registration for the next semester of Kindermusik.

Two-year-old children and their parents will interact with jingling bells, pounding drums, floating scarves, and "hooting owls," while moving to the music. Three-year-old students will learn to sing in tune and keep a beat, singing folk songs and playing rhythm instruments. Four- to seven-year-olds will read pitches, and play bells and dulcimers.

A powerful learning experience for a child, Kindermusik enhances the total development of the pupil by strengthening physical, emotional, social and cognitive skills at a very early age. A warm, creative learning

environment is provided for both children and parents.

The Calderone School of Music is a professional music school, offering private lessons on every instrument and Kindermusik. The school is rated by Kindermusik International as one of the top 100 Kindermusik centers in the world and teachers are certified music educators with many years of teaching experience, and they are also young child specialists.

Musicians with advanced degrees, most of whom are college professors, give private lessons on the instruments.

For more information regarding either location, please call (973) 428-0405 or visit [www.att.net/home/~calderoneschoolofmusic](http://www.att.net/home/~calderoneschoolofmusic).

## Kent Place Teacher Pleasantly Puzzles Beholders at Gallery

SUMMIT — Through Friday, October 4, at the Kent Place Gallery in Summit, artist Ken Weathersby will exhibit a selection of visually opulent recent paintings on panel and canvas that explore aspects of the maze.

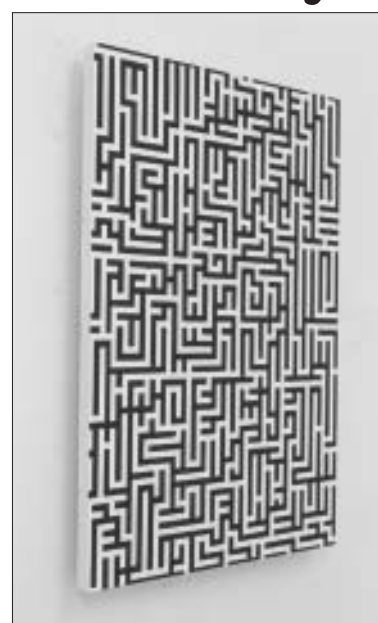
Weathersby currently teaches Fine Arts at Kent Place School. His recent exhibitions include a 20-year retrospective, *Ken Weathersby 11 Samples: 20 Year Sequence* at Rutgers University's John Cotton Dana Library in Newark, The International Juried Show at New Jersey Center for Visual Arts in Summit, and *Emerging New York Artists* at Westfield State College in Massachusetts. He holds a Master of Fine Arts Degree from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Detroit.

The black-and-white mazes, which comprise the majority of Weathersby's paintings in this show, are meant to do several things at once. At first glance, they are vibrantly patterned fields, dazzling to the eye, and harking back to Op Art paintings of the 1960s. As abstract paintings they also connect with the modernism of early 20th century masters like Mondrian.

Weathersby said the paintings "are meant to be stimulating and pleasurable, but are also about difficulty."

"To me, this is like much of our experience today," he stated. "We deal with uncentered fields containing many choices and few apparent boundaries, as when using the Internet, or doing something as ordinary as navigating through a maze of recorded phone messages, trying to get to a live person."

"Even though it seems like a modern condition, I found myself looking partly to references for the paintings from other times as well, studying the history of more ancient labyrinth forms, and reading Dante's account of a journey through a different kind of maze, 'The Inferno.'"



"Maze 1," Ken Weathersby, 13 x 20, acrylic on panel, 1999.

An artists' reception will be held tomorrow, Friday, September 20, from 6 to 8 p.m. in the gallery. The exhibit and reception are free and open to the public.

The Kent Place Gallery, which is located in Summit on the campus of Kent Place School, is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, or by appointment with Judy Lapides, Director.

For more information, please call (908) 273-0900, extension no 332.

## Jen's Trends: Beauty Products

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

ucts along with a dosage of psychology. *Origins* and *Philosophy* make great skin and haircare products. Try their wonderful conditioners and facial masks, in particular.

On the other hand, women are not the only ones who get to indulge in such luxuries. There are numerous collections solely dedicated to men, and frankly it's about time! After all, men need to take care of their skin just as much as women do.

Some of the most popular products on the market are by *Nickel*, a brand that is purely dedicated to pampering men. *Nickel* products can be purchased at *Sephora* or at the *Nickel USA Spa for Men* on Eighth Avenue in New York City.

However, the most recent beauty sanctuary can be found in our own downtown Westfield at *JetLife Sun Spa and Lifestyles Store*. The spa/boutique features an array of skincare products as well as a wide selection of candles and superbly unique merchandise.

According to owner, Peter Matushin, *JetLife* products are fragrant, vitamin-enhanced and, more importantly, no products are tested on animals. Matushin also reiterated

that Westfield is the location of his first store and that the second *JetLife* is expected to be in the SoHo district of Manhattan.


Nevertheless, in the end, it's all about finding products that adjust to your personal lifestyle. You will find that beauty is no longer skin deep and that retailers are taking a closer look at individual

**PSYCHOLOGY PLEASE...** For a relaxing manicure or pedicure try *Tony & Tina* nail polish. For \$10 you can get an order of soothing color therapy and psychology with your favorite shade of polish. *Tony & Tina* products can be found at *Nordstrom*.



and everyone in between.

Ultimately, beauty products are not only about looking good, they're about feeling healthy: mentally and physically. So treat yourself and indulge in this season's hottest beauty products.



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## Songs in the Spirit Cabaret Invites Actors to Audition

WESTFIELD — The Rainbow Experience, a community theater group, will hold auditions for "Songs in the Spirit: A Coffeehouse Cabaret" on Monday, September 23, at 7:30 p.m. at the United Church of Christ in Plainfield, 220 West Seventh Street, Plainfield and Tuesday, September 24, at 7:30 p.m. at the First Congregational Church in Westfield, 125 Elmer Street in Westfield.

Auditions, which will be held on a first-come, first-serve basis, are open to youngsters and adults, ages 12 and above. Participants should be prepared to sing 16 to 32 bars of a song they like. Sheet music in the proper key or a tape should be brought. Please bring a picture or resumé if available.

For more information, please call Jessica Beltz at (908) 754-4837.

## Holiday Theme Revealed By Chansonettes Group

WESTFIELD — The Chansonettes, a women's choral group who sing for fun and the love of music, have begun rehearsals for the upcoming holiday season, which will feature the theme, "Go in on a Sleigh Ride."

New members are always welcome to join. For membership information, please call Jackie Costello at (908) 789-5819. Organizations wishing to book a performance may contact Amy Herrington at (908) 317-5910.

Rehearsals are held every Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church in Westfield.

The group is under the direction of Jean Schork and accompanied by Mary Ellen Freda.

## Hometown Authors To Host Book Signing

WESTFIELD — Former Westfield residents Jessica and Lee Miller will be at the Town Book Store in Westfield on Saturday, September 21, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. to sign and discuss copies of their new book, "A Woman's Guide to Successful Negotiating: How to Convince, Collaborate and Create Your Way to Agreement."

Signed and reserved copies of the Millers' book are available to those who cannot attend the book signing. For more information, please call the Town Book Store at (908) 233-3535.



## Heather Darrow Takes Role in Sly Fox Production

WESTFIELD — Westfield resident Heather Darrow will portray the role of "Mrs. Truckle" in *Sly Fox*, an ongoing production at Circle Players in Piscataway.

Previously, Heather played "Sister" in *It Runs in the Family* with the Westfield Community Players. She recently moved to Westfield from the Boston area.

Heather holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Performing Arts from Bradford College, where she was seen in many roles, including "Cinderella" in *Into The Woods*, "Cecily" in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and "Winnifred" in *Once Upon A Mattress*.

On a full-time basis, Heather, who is pursuing a career in professional theater, film and television, works in the marketing department of the New York City Opera at Lincoln Center.

From the author who brought you SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE, a play THE NEW YORK TIMES hailed as, "Devilishly playful, a feast of tricky, eloquent charm..."



# Artist Descending a Staircase

by Tom Stoppard

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