



POPCORN™

Away from Her: Looking into Long-term Extended Love

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

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
3 and 1/2 popcorns

Unremittingly honest, director Sarah Polley's *Away from Her* recalls a bemoaning analysis of American movie tastes once opined by a scr *New York Times*. It explained why motion pictures like this provocative accomplishment just off the festival circuit don't play in Peoria.

The author grumbled that cinema in these United States suffered from our disinclination to do the heavy mental lifting. No market...no film.

All of which, I suggest, may be due to living in an empire perennially split over its wars with one nation or another, no national health plan, and a plague of gas station attendants who swear that their rest rooms are out of order.

Hence, we want Happy/Stupid-Crazy/Revenge at the multiplex. Besides, downtown at The Art, if we need 'em, we've got those depressing French and Italian films, plus an ever-ready supply of sad old Swedish stuff.

All that said, if you've room for just a few superbly dramatized, albeit inconvenient truths in your life, and don't happen to live in Peoria, don't miss this stunning film.

A wonderful little study in love and devotion adapted from Alice Munro's *The Bear Came over the Mountain*, it is the perfect example of that cultural component too often missing from our cinema.

Maybe because it's Canadian. Still, all that enlightenment without subtitles is quite the deal.

But the greatest attraction here is the sensational chemistry Julie Christie and Gordon Pinsent create as Fiona and Grant Andersson, lovebirds of 44 years.

The dissection of a marriage and what becomes of it when Alzheimer's disease yields its ugly havoc, *Away from Her* adds a tremendously bitter-sweet addendum to the notion of conubial commitment.

You see, Fiona has made up her mind to be institutionalized. She has become a danger to herself. She won't subject Grant to the impossible task.

This is tough stuff. We've no doubt that the phenomenally portrayed couple are in love.

Not that Grant has been the perfect spouse. During the drive to the extended care facility, Fiona notes an irony...how there are some things that still refuse to be forgotten. She alludes to the string of co-eds that was part and parcel of Grant's earlier life as a college professor. "Things we still don't talk about."

The quiet revelation is deafening. It establishes a truth to anchor plot and subtexts alike. So here they still are, survivors, dedicated just the same. And now there's this.

Kean Stages Revue During Celebration of Pride Month

AREA - *Ten Percent Revue*, Tom Weinberg's gay-themed musical, will be presented at Kean University's Murphy-Dunn Theatre in the Vaughn-Eames Building, located at 1000 Morris Avenue in Union. The production will be presented Saturday and Sunday June 2 and 3, and from Wednesday, June 6 to Saturday, June 9.

'Next Stop Hollywood' Selects Bittner's Story

WESTFIELD - Russell Bittner, son of Walter and Jean Bittner, formerly of Highland Avenue in Westfield, was recently selected for inclusion in a ground-breaking anthology: "Next Stop Hollywood," just published by St. Martin's Press.

Mr. Bittner's short story, "Waltzing Matilda," was selected from more than 600 submissions from around the world.

"Next Stop Hollywood" is a collection of 15 previously unpublished short stories that have potential as movies.

A synopsis of each story, author bios and one of the winning stories are posted at nextstophollywood.org.

Gallery 23 Names Musicant, Marchant Featured Artists

WESTFIELD - Judith Musicant of Mountainside and Catherine Marchant of Westfield are artists of the month at Gallery 23 in Blairstown. Their work will be featured throughout June in the windows of the gallery. The public is invited to a reception in their honor on Saturday, June 2, from 1 to 5 p.m.

Ms. Musicant creates functional stone-ware pottery. Her work has been shown in juried exhibits at Peters Valley Crafts Center, Morristown Unitarian Fellowship Exhibition and the New Jersey Center for Visual Arts.

Her work was included in "500 Pitchers: Contemporary Expressions of a Classic Form," published by Lark, and in *Ceramics Review*, a British journal of ceramic arts.

"I work primarily on the potter's wheel," Ms. Musicant said, "but, be-

cause clay is so plastic and forgiving, I find it almost impossible to throw a symmetrical object and leave it at that. I am forever poking, pulling, cutting or otherwise altering the thrown pot in some fashion. This is what creates a body of work that reflects my vision of what art for everyday use can offer to you."

Ms. Marchant specializes in hand woven and knitted clothing and beaded jewelry. Trademarks of Ms. Marchant's art are bright colors and the inclusion of glittery threads and beads. "I want the people wearing my creations to stand out," she said.

Gallery 23, an artist co-op, is located at 23 Main Street. Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. For more information, call (908) 362-6865 or visit the gallery's website at gallery23.com.

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COFFEE'S UP...Jerry Orbach, left, and Al Pacino star in *Chinese Coffee*, a movie written by Westfield resident Ira Lewis. In a collaborative effort between *The Westfield Leader*, Mr. Lewis and Northside Trattoria, the restaurant will house a special invite-only screening on Sunday, June 10.

COFFEE from 23

WHS: SENIOR ART

will continue to pursue art next year at Syracuse University's art school. "I really like how flexible the college is," said Sarah, who plans to major in advertising design. "Also, it's a prestigious design school in a great environment."

Her favorite piece featured in the art show, one of almost ten works, is the "Replacement Assignment" based off of Vermeer's "Girl with a Pearl Earring." The students had to study a classic painting and then reinvent it by modernizing the appearance (Sarah wrapped her hair in a towel instead of a kerchief). Sarah's self-portrait is in pastels, her favorite medium, and required self-observation with a mirror and photographs to create the impressive likeness.

Senior Madeline Joyce's work has been displayed in art shows, in the pages of the student publication *The Amphibian*, and has even graced the cover of *Folio*, WHS's literary magazine. Her self-portrait, made with ink and markers, is one of several she has completed in various art classes, and exhibits her signature style that combines intricate details with fascinating

thing but simple. Drawing (no pun intended) inspiration from her favorite song lyrics, Ashley created a piece with hundreds of scribbled words of all shapes and sizes that form the image of her face. "I wanted to create something that shows how I see myself. So, instead of using restrictive element like lines, shading, and color, I used words to capture the real me." Though she will not continue her study of art next year at the University of Santa Clara, Ashley said she will always remain passionate about her artistic works.

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UCHS Teacher Addresses Jesus At Home in Book

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*

AREA - Keeping Christ at the center of the home and family is the message of a new book by biblical scholar and Union Catholic High School (UCHS) teacher Allan Wright.

"Jesus in the House: Gospel Reflections on Christ's Presence in the Home" is the second book by Mr. Wright, who is a nationally known speaker and writer.

His first book, "Silent Witnesses in the Gospels," is a compilation of the lives of the many people mentioned in the Gospels who influence the stories without uttering a word.

"Jesus in the House" addresses the importance Jesus placed on home and family, as evidenced in his day-to-day ministry.

Using examples from the Scriptures, Mr. Wright isolates Gospel references to the home and offers ways to integrate a Christ-centered lifestyle into modern-day lives.

According to Mr. Wright, the word "home" is used 33 times, and the word "house" 99 times in the Gospels of the New Revised Standard Version Bible.

These many references stand as proof that Jesus ministered as much in private as he did in public.

"Much of Jesus' healing, teaching and forgiving took place in the home," said Mr. Wright.

"The book invites the reader to reflect on one's own experience of 'home' and how healing can be brought there," he continued.

Mr. Wright holds a Master of Arts degree in Biblical Studies from Immaculate Conception Seminary at Seton Hall University, and he has studied in Israel.

He has taught theology at UCHS for more than 20 years. The Archdiocese of Newark named him "Teacher of the Year" for the 2000-2001 academic year.

He is currently the director of Apostolic Connections - an organization charged with training and empowering lay leaders in the Church by assisting in the spiritual formation of children, as called for by Pope John Paul II.

"I feel I am in a good position to bring [children] the news about Jesus," said Mr. Wright.

He also speaks regularly at churches throughout New Jersey and universities nationwide.

He has written for many print and online publications, including *The National Catholic Register*, *The Wanderer*, *Catholic Exchange*, *Catholic Online* and others.

"Jesus in the House: Gospel Reflections on Christ's Presence in the Home," is published by St. Anthony Messenger Press and is available at allanwright.org.



STILL WAITING...Director and co-star Joe Penczak as Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* helps the blinded Pozzo (Fred Cruz) while a bewildered Estragon (Ken Bigelow), right, contemplates life. In Westfield's Memorial Park, the Saturday and Sunday performances of Samuel Beckett's absurdist drama were presented by Troupe of Friends, Inc. and sponsored by the Westfield Recreation Department.

TAKE THE STAGE

Godot's Absurdity Makes For Perfect Saturday Matinee

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY
Specially Written for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*

WESTFIELD - When the assignment came in to review Samuel Beckett's absurdist play, *Waiting for Godot*, I accepted it with interest.

Then came an irksome fly in the ointment...it was being presented in Westfield's Memorial Park at 4 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday of Memorial Day weekend. "Bring your own blanket or lawn chair," the advance press notice read.

I wondered what "genius" selected this weighty play for Memorial Day weekend. *Waiting for Godot* is not often on the list of must see shows for children unless they are prodigies.

I got to meet the "genius," Joe Penczak, after the production. During it, however, not only did his genius in the play's selection unfold, but also his brilliant acting ability in the role of Vladimir.

Two bedraggled vagabonds—Estragon (Ken Bigelow) and Vladimir (Joe Penczak)—hang around a single tree in an open field (perfectly set on Memorial Park Field) waiting for their appointment with the unseen, unknown Godot.

Like an old grumpy married couple, the two disheveled homeless men verbally exchange insults, but are content to have each other in their possessionless world.

They hike figuratively through philosophical mountains searching for the meaning of life while exploring the importance of dependency on others for survival.

Two other characters Pozzo (Fred Cruz) and Lucky (Charlie Mulrooney) wander into the main characters' lives. Mr. Cruz is amazingly consistent and funny in his pompous characterization of Pozzo.

Lucky, who is alternately called "pig," and treated like swine, proves to be an idiot savant.

Tethered physically to Pozzo in the first act, Lucky, ironically, finds himself in the savior role in the second act when Pozzo becomes blind.

A possible forerunner of the movie *Ground Hog Day* where the main character wakes up to his same life replayed daily, this show portrays the monotony of the lives of these characters. "Nothing happens," says one character and that "nothing" keeps repeating itself eternally. Yet this isn't Seinfeld's show about "nothing."

The play is a philosophical goldmine. In fact, every other sentence is so pithy; the phrases could be emblazoned on refrigerator magnets - "Habit is a great deadener," "Light gleams for an instant and then it's night again," "We are all born mad."

Talented Mr. Bigelow and Mr. Penczak capitalize on the humor to bring it to life. Much of the deadpan wit is slapstick borrowing bits from Laurel and Hardy, Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin who saw irony and played off it.

In their long dialogues, Messrs. Bigelow and Penczak offer rapid-fire repartee reminiscent of two equally matched opponents at a world championship tennis match.

When I interviewed the exhausted yet enervated director/actor Mr. Penczak after the performance, he shared his secret of their perfect timing and ease of interaction. They had worked together previously at the McKinley School fundraiser show. In fact they did the "Who's on First?" bit of Abbott and Costello.

"We ran lines as we commuted on the train to NYC every day," Mr. Penczak shared. "I'm sure some of the passengers thought we were crazy."

After seeing the production, I didn't have to ask this Westfield "genius" why he selected *Godot* for the May production.

"Although part of the mission of Troupe of Friends, Inc. is to do free Shakespeare in Westfield," explained Mr. Penczak, "I wanted to do something different for the first show."

Slapstick comedy involving flatulence, urination and dropped drawers mingles with philosophical discourse. With "Lighting by God(ot)," roaring trains, chirping birds and ice cream trucks' songs as a backdrop, the absurdity of this play was perfect for a hot Saturday matinee.

Coffee with Conscience Wraps up 7th Season

WESTFIELD - The Coffee With Conscience Concert Series will wrap up its seventh season by presenting Tom Prasada-Rao and Cary Cooper, better known as the Dreamscapes.

The concert will take place at the First United Methodist Church of Westfield at 1 East Broad Street (on the corner of North Avenue) in Westfield on Saturday, June 16.

Doors will open at 7:30 p.m., and the concert begins at 8. Admission is \$15. All net proceeds from the evening's concert will be donated to Habitat for Humanity.

For more information about the Coffee With Conscience Concert Series, the upcoming performance or ways to get involved with the series, visit coffeewithconscience.org, call the concert hotline at (908) 412-9105 or send an e-mail to concerts4causes@aol.com. Volunteers are always appreciated.



MADDY JOYCE



SUZIE MORGAN

Penczak: 'Life Happens While We're Waiting'

By JENNA NIERSTEDT
Specially Written for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*

WESTFIELD - Troupe of Friends, Inc., a local non-profit company organized to present public performances, delivered two free showings of *Waiting for Godot*, an absurdist play that entertains audiences with humor, drama and the prospect of Godot's arrival.

"It's a challenging play, one of my favorite plays, and I don't see plays like this done for free in this community," said director Joe Penczak. "I just really wanted the opportunity to do this for people, to expose them to classic pieces of work like this."

Immediately before the opening scene, Assistant Director Susan Bigelow encouraged those in attendance to participate and engage in the story. In accordance with the absurd nature of the play she said, "It's a comedy, feel free to cry. It's a tragedy, feel free to laugh."

Although critics denounce the play

because it lacks a climax and conclusion, the intentionally uneventful and repetitive plot has been noted to symbolize the tedium and meaninglessness of human life. As Estragon says, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes" while discussing the agony of waiting for Godot, the speech seems to reflect a search for the meaning of life.