

Arts & Entertainment



POPCORN™ Superstar Has Some Good Points

By Michael S. Goldberg

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

2 & 1/2 popcorns

Do you know who Mary Katherine Gallagher is? Surely you must be familiar with this icon of adolescent angst — the indisputable poster child for feminine Nerdism. For "Saturday Night Live" (SNL) fans acquainted with comedian Molly Shannon's boisterous characterization, mere mention of the teen-aged underdog evokes a sympathetic smile. And more likely than not, the feature length exploits of this maladroitness will prove comically rewarding.

But for the heretofore uninitiated, probably busying themselves dusk to dawn with contemplations on "Billy Budd" and the like, *Superstar* affords the humorously effervescent opportunity to finally meet this Calamity Jane of the high school set. Certainly Mr. Melville will wait, and this pop diversion may prove more cerebrally gratifying than expected.

Mary Katherine is an absurdist reminder that one never truly relinquishes the status either earned or imprinted on them in secondary school — that no matter where we were or are on the popularity rung, there's a little bit of this clumsy Catholic schoolgirl in us all.

Hence, encumbered with all manner of self-consciously displeasing habits, Miss Gallagher is both pathetic foil and introspective source of empathy. Caught practicing her long romantic kisses on a tree, Mary tells a nun that she's just doing her part to help the rain forest.

To make time pass in church, she and fellow geek Helen (Emmy Laybourne) pretend that they are international super models at a photo shoot.

Mary Katherine Gallagher's fondest desire is to smooch with Sky Corrigan (Will Ferrell), the school's undisputed Mr. Cool.

Psychologists contend that our very sense of maturity depends on how well we adjust to and incorporate the experiences of our youth. And in this respect *Superstar* exhibits a smidgen more savvy than one would expect from a frivolous farce.

But the advice here is to take a little break from all that quasi-intellectual gobbledegook and just accept *Superstar* for the occasionally touching but more often hilarious fluff that it really is.

Like almost every SNL skit-turned-movie that has come before it, *Superstar* has no plot to mention. Rather, the entire focus is on Mary Katherine's single-minded quest for love and acceptance, which surely will be hers — if only she can achieve stardom.

However, Grandma, portrayed from a wheelchair by Glynis Johns, is against it. If she has her way, Mary will become something safe, like a businesswoman.

You see, the would-be title character has always been told she was rendered an orphan when her parents were killed by hammerhead sharks. But they only told Mary Katherine that to "make her feel good," to shield her from the painful truth; ominously indicating a family curse, in reality Mom and Dad were stomped to death in an Irish step-dancing competition.

Eerily, grandmother, too, sustained her paralysis in a shockingly similar incident whilst performing *Mame* on Broadway. Thus, the upcoming talent show at St. Monica's High School is out! Too bad that the contest offers its first prize winner a trip to Hollywood where they'll appear in a film with "positive moral values."

Undaunted, Mary muses, "Think of it, a bona fide superstar. That'd show 'em all." Especially heartthrob Sky and his obnoxiously perfect girlfriend, Evian (Elaine Hendrix), who for some unexplained reason was named after a bottled water.

Possessing no shortage of imagination, the stary-eyed girl enjoys a rather vivid fantasy life, which director Bruce McCulloch successfully displays through a series of wonderfully whimsical dream sequences.

Will Ferrell's aforementioned golden boy does double duty here by also appearing in Mary Katherine's wish fulfillment fantasies; he is especially ingratiating as her idea of a jiggy-with-it Jesus particularly attuned to the pangs of teen insecurity.

Unfortunately, save for those delicious illusory excursions, Mr. McCulloch's neat but plain direction boasts few creative nuances. Which is probably how the producers wanted it and not entirely the director's fault.

Motion pictures emanating from Lorne Michaels's SNL fea-

tures machine generally exhibit artistic properties that fall somewhere between the linear flatness of most made-for-TV movies and the more glossy dimension of theatrical release films.

They already have a built-in audience, and since appearing one day on PBS or the Bravo channel is hardly among their chief goals, pushing the envelope beyond those risks already hazarded on television is apparently discouraged.

But then, although respectfully casting a knowing wink in the direction of its predominantly PG-13 audience, *Superstar* rarely pretends to be anything more than an inconsequential romp through the joys and ravages of adolescence.

And considering that virtually no substantial subtext supports the status-conscious little world where Mary Katherine Gallagher reigns as Queen Dork, the lack of pretense is a somewhat redeeming discretion.

Yet except for Mr. Ferrell's almost show-stealing performance(s), the real reason to see *Superstar* is Miss Shannon herself. Raucously self-effacing, her anything-for-a-laugh energy sublimely translates to Mary Katherine's show biz zeal.

Possessing a special physicality to match the inner Pagliacci that fuels her comic fervor, she may not be a fully dimensional comedian à la Mary Tyler Moore or Carol Burnett. But, she is a legitimate clown, fondly recalling the comic adroitness of Imogene Coca. And that's not shabby.

As written by Steve Koren, the paper-thin script surrounding Mary Katherine Gallagher's exploits somewhat tarnishes *Superstar*. Happily, Miss Shannon remains nothing less than stellar.

Superstar, rated PG-13, is a Paramount Pictures release directed by Bruce McCulloch and stars Molly Shannon, Will Ferrell and Emmy Laybourne. Running time: 88 minutes

Town Book Store Slates Book Discussion

WESTFIELD — The Town Book Store of Westfield will hold its next Book Discussion Group meeting on Tuesday, November 9, at 8 p.m. at the store.

The November book selection is "Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table," by food critic Ruth Reichl.

Meetings are open to the public. Participants should read the book prior to attending. The book may be purchased at The Town Book Store at a 20 percent discount.

For more information, please call The Town Book Store at (908) 233-3535.

Homeless to Benefit Set at Kuran Arts Ctr.

FANWOOD — A special benefit for the homeless will be held at the Patricia Kuran Arts Center, located at 129 Watson Road in Fanwood, on Tuesday, October 26, at 7:30 p.m.

The benefit will feature performances of poetry, music and song featuring the Can of Corn Poetry Project.

The Can of Corn Project was established early in the 1990s to help provide a supplemental food source for the homeless and hungry in Union County. Admission to Can of Corn events is always free, but audience members are asked to bring donations of nonperishable food items which are distributed to area food banks. Proceeds from the Tuesday, October 26 performance will go to the Fanwood Presbyterian Church Food Bank.

Cranford poets Joe Weil and Deborah La Veglia, the Project's founders, will perform keyboard and vocal duets, and Fanwood author Adele Kenny will read from her latest collection of poems.

According to Ms. Kenny, "Art for art's sake is a wonderful ideal, but art with a social conscience — art for humanity's sake — is what the Can of Corn Project is all about."

Area residents who are unable to attend, are invited to leave food items at the Kuran Center from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on the night of the benefit.

For further information and directions, please call (908) 889-7223.

WESTFIELD Y'S MEN'S CLUB PLANS HALLOWEEN PARADE

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Y's Men's Club will host its 39th annual Halloween Parade and Costume Contest for children through grade five on Sunday, October 24, at the Elm Street Field in Westfield, beginning with the costume contest at 12:30 p.m.

Costumes will be judged and free treat bags will be distributed to children between 12:45 and 1:30 p.m.

The parade will begin at 1:30 p.m. from Elm Street Field and travel on Elm Street to East Broad Street and into Mindowaskin Park. The parade will be led by the Westfield Fire Department's Super Truck and the Westfield High School

marching band.

Awards will be given following the parade at the gazebo in Mindowaskin park. Ribbons will be awarded for 1st, 2nd and 3rd places for each age group. For groups of five or more, there will be cash prizes awarded for 1st (\$35), 2nd (\$25) and 3rd (\$15).

The club is a non-profit organization and annually sponsors a Christmas tree sale at the Elm Street Field between Thanksgiving and Christmas. The funds generated by the tree sale are donated to a variety of community organizations.

For membership information, please call the Westfield Y at (908) 233-2700.

Coffee, Dessert With Maestro Slated By Symphony Friends

WESTFIELD — Music Director and Conductor David Wroe of the Westfield Symphony Orchestra (WSO) will join the Friends of the WSO for a Coffee and Dessert for prospective members on Thursday, October 28, from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at a member's home in Westfield.

Maestro Wroe, internationally acclaimed conductor of the WSO, which is now in its 17th year, will discuss ways to enrich and enhance the home through music.

Individuals interested in meeting Maestro Wroe and learning more about the Friends' 1999-2000 season of activities are invited to attend the coffee. For location information, please call Director Deirdre Malacrea at (908) 789-0979.

The goal of the Friends of the WSO is to promote community interest in the Orchestra, which is comprised of professional musicians and has been recognized as one of New Jersey's leading orchestras.

The Friends support the Or-

chestra and its musical education and outreach programs through fundraising activities held throughout the year, including the Annual Tour of Notable Homes, which was attended last year by more than 1,500 people and will be held next year on Sunday, May 7.



SEASON OVERTURE...The Friends of the Westfield Symphony Orchestra kicked off their 1999-2000 calendar of activities in support of the Symphony at a reception held at the Westfield home of Jane and Lou Franz. Enjoying the day, from left to right, are: Carole Brendel, Emma DeGiralamo, Juergen Brendel, Myriam Gabriel and Executive Director of the Symphony Nancy N. Jackson. Prospective members are invited to learn more about the Friends at a Coffee and Dessert with Maestro David Wroe on Thursday, October 28.

Halloween Haunts Set At The Morris Museum

MORRISTOWN — "Halloween at The Morris Museum" will be held on Saturday, October 30, and Sunday, October 31, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., rain or shine, at The Morris Museum, 6 Normandy Heights Road, Morristown.

The Museum has prepared a haunted house, an animal graveyard, pumpkin painting and spider hanging. Costumed characters will roam around the galleries.

Visitors are welcome to attend the event in costume.

Admission is \$8 for children (\$5 for Museum Members), \$6 for adults (\$1 for Museum Members). Pre-registration is not required.

For more information, please call (973) 538-0454, Extension No. 242.

Muckraker

Continued from Page 22

and individuals are too timid to approach, let alone publish.

The writing style is innovative and reminiscent of the great Joyce Carol Oates ("Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been?") and Mr. Callahan's literary heroes, S.E. Hinton ("The Outsiders," "Tex," "Rumble Fish") and Jack Kerouac ("On the Road," "Desolation Angels"). Fluid, and far from flowery, "Muckraker" takes readers beyond their imaginations and defies the possibility of saving the story for a rainy day.

There is romance, danger, action and nuggets of wisdom that exceed the average 20-something imagination and soul of any writer I've ever known. In summary, if you're looking for a suspense thriller, laced with the sweet innocence of romance and honesty that packs a punch, find "Muckraker" at your local book store. Treat yourself this Halloween.

In conclusion, Mr. Callahan mused about his backpacking trip across the country one summer — a true adventure since the young author hadn't traveled past Eastern Pennsylvania before his jaunt. He hopes to share his experience with readers in a new piece he will develop.

He would also like to test his talent in short story writing and music writing. Mr. Callahan is also the author of "The Wildflower" and "For Lindsey."

"Muckraker" was published by The Town Book Press, the publishing arm of The Town Book Store in Westfield.

Ghosthunters

Continued from Page 22

my aura increased brighter like white light. These lost souls were attracted to my energy field."

"Since I was trying to direct them to the real light and not mine, I had to redirect them. In the end, when they were onto their path of the light, the house became more calm and returned peacefully," Ms. Muller said.

The society meets once a month and welcomes all first-time visitors. The group discusses ghost photography and hands-on investigations. Sometimes members venture out to cemeteries with cameras or audio recordings to capture what some may call ghostly images. These images are known as orbs — a ball of energy of a spirit.

Other descriptions of ghosts caught on film are referred to as a vortex, which is tube of light or a string of light and then there is ectoplasm, which is a fog-like mist, according to Ghost Hunter member and Clairvoyant/Tarot/Aura Reader, Patti Schenck of Branchburg.

"One night, I was driving home with my niece on Industrial Avenue in Raritan Center, and coming out from the marshy area to my left came a male ghost figure from the early 20th century," said Ms. Schenck.

"I screamed to my niece 'did you see him?' Covering in the corner of the car with her jacket over her head, she exclaimed, 'No, I don't want to see any ghosts!'," reported Ms. Schenck.

"The ghost came right across my front windshield and then vanished!" she commented.

Whether it's an October chilly wind opening or closing your door, or the swaying trees tapping on your windows, it's enough to send an occasional chill up your spine and make you wonder "What if?"

The next meeting for the Ghost Hunters Society, Inc. will be on Friday, November 19, at 7:30 p.m. at the Community Room in Westfield, 425 East Broad Street.

To view ghost photos and read of haunted places in New Jersey, please visit the Society's Web site at www.erols.com/zensible1. For more information, please call (908) 654-7502.

Happy Hauntings!

The Source for Local Arts & Entertainment: www.goleader.com

SPECIAL NOTICE:

Due to our special 10/28 edition, all A&E press releases must be received by tomorrow at 4 p.m. to be considered for publication. 250 words or less, typed.

No EXCEPTIONS!!



Calling All Actors! CDC Plans Casting Call For Mame Production

CRANFORD — The Cranford Dramatic Club (CDC) will hold open auditions for its musical production of *Mame* on Tuesday, October 26, at 7 p.m. at the theater, 78 Winans Avenue, Cranford.

The production will be held next year from Friday, February 11, to Saturday, February 26.

There are seven male and four female singing roles available for the large ensemble. Seven additional characters and a group of young dancers and singers should be prepared to sing, "Mame."

All auditioners must sing and prepare a song from the show.

For more information, please contact Peter Clark, Director, at (908) 709-4393.

Allen and Peter Yu Earn Chopin Prize

WESTFIELD — Westfield pianists Allen and Peter Yu were named co-winners of the Chopin Sesquicentenary Prize by the Polish Cultural Foundation of Clark.

The award was made by the Foundation as part of its observance of International Chopin Year.

The Yu brothers are piano students of Dr. Ferdinand Gajewski of Westfield.

Holiday Craft Fair Planned at Vo-Tech

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Union County Vocational-Technical Schools (UCTVS) will hold their eighth annual Holiday Craft Fair on Saturday, November 6, from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the Raritan Road Campus.

Crafters from New Jersey and other states will feature their wares. All proceeds will benefit deserving UCVTS students.

Admission is free. Raffles and other specialties will be featured. Refreshments will be available.



COMEDIC ENSEMBLE...Ken Ludwig's comedy, Moon Over Buffalo, will be held on Fridays and Saturdays, October 22, 23 and 30, November 5 and 6, with a special 3 p.m. matinee on Sunday, November 7. All other shows will be held at 8 p.m. at the Westfield Community Players theater in Westfield. All tickets are \$12. Pictured, left to right, are: standing, Linda Correll, Matthew Kaplan, Linda Guiditta, Stanley Kaplan, John Correll, Patti Vidakovic; seated, Rich Sibello and Mary Kate Cullinan.

Moon Over Buffalo to Open Community Players Season

WESTFIELD — Ken Ludwig's comedy, *Moon Over Buffalo*, will be held on Fridays and Saturdays, October 22, 23 and 30, November 5 and 6, with a special 3 p.m. matinee on Sunday, November 7. All other shows will be held at 8 p.m. at the Westfield Community Players theater in Westfield. All tickets are \$12.

For ticket information, please call the box office at (908) 232-1221 and Burgdorff ERA in Westfield.

Funding has been made possible in part by the New Jersey

State Council on the Arts, Department of State, funded through a grant administered by the Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs.

African Violet Society To Meet on October 21

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Union County Chapter of the African Violet Society will meet on Thursday, October 21, at 1 p.m. in the Scotch Plains Library.

The program will be entitled, "Bugs, Sprays and Drenches."

FANWOOD HALLOWEEN PARADE, PARTY SET FOR OCTOBER 31

FANWOOD — Fanwood Recreation will sponsor its annual Halloween parade and party on Sunday, October 31, beginning at 6:45 p.m. at the Fanwood Memorial Library.

Parade participants should gather at the library by 6:15 p.m.

The parade will begin at the library and end at LaGrande

Park, where prizes for the spookiest, funniest and most original costumes will be awarded. Prizes will be given out according to various age groups.

There will also be a Jack-O-Lantern contest at LaGrande Park. All contestants should have their Jack-

O-Lantern at the park by 6 p.m.

