

Comic genius by Neil Simon

by Judith Pratt

Halifax audiences will soon be offered the enchantment of Neil Simon's new movie, *The Goodbye Girl*. Following the wrenching frustration of *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, which left audiences feeling like they had just been kicked between the legs, *The Goodbye Girl* is comparable to having your hair tousled and your cheeks pinched. The plot offers audiences the one element missing in so many cinematic ventures today—unmitigated success.

The success of the movie itself depends on three and a half factors. The first and foremost is Neil Simon's comic genius. There have been moments in the past when his talent has been questionable—most notably in *The Heartbreak Kid* and in *The Last of the Red Hot Lovers*. But when balanced against *The Odd Couple* and now *The Goodbye Girl*, which also involves an unlikely couple, reasserting the scientific claim that opposites attract, Simon's genius once again surmounts criticism. His strength lies primarily in characterization. The characters here of Paula and Elliot are beset by frailties, inconsistencies, particular neurosis, and common misunderstandings and failings. It is a joy to see the two battle with themselves and each other while maintaining always an element of sympathy and pathos. Laughter undercuts even the sharpest of sentiments and, whether it is sexual, social or slapstick, the humour appeals to everyone who has ever felt the frustration of unwittingly forming a relationship.

The second factor contributing to the excellence of *The Goodbye Girl* is Richard Dreyfuss. Initially placed in the role of a heavy having to force

either an eviction or a compromise from a middle-aged woman and her daughter, his comic potential surfaces immediately and spontaneously. When he is forced, in the name of art, to portray Richard III as the second biggest queen in England (the director of the off-Broadway production insists that Shakespeare himself occupies the highest queenly throne), the result is a club-footed, hunch-back, squeaky-voiced interpretation of the ogre-like Richard, dressed in flimsy pink and grey tights and vest. Despite the terrible reception the public gives the play, Elliot goes on to prove his talent as an actor of merit. Always assuming roles, he adorns the trappings of benefactor, of Humphrey Bogart, of bouncer in a bar, and finally of the ecstatic lover. Dreyfuss brings life to Elliot and, with an odd mysticism which belongs only to Dreyfuss, allows the audience to laugh and sob at the same instance.

The third factor comprising the success of the movie is Marsha Mason, Neil Simon's wife and the woman who received *The Goodbye Girl* as an anniversary present. Despite the over abundance of tears, Paula emerges from behind her facade of bitterness after being deserted by her actor-boyfriend, to bloom and almost visibly shed many of her thirty-three years as she realizes a deep understanding and love for Elliot. Mason portrays Paula with vivid and fleshy tones, always aware of the insecure failings integral to her role of a recently deserted woman. There is a sense of the absurd lying beneath Paul's guise of hopeful breadwinner and moral directive for her daughter, which finally bursts forth when faced with Elliot's recurring absurdities.

The half factor is Quinn Cummings, who plays Paula's nine year old daughter. Her face covered with spaghetti sauce in one scene, she attempts to deliver a serious critique of Elliot as "a sexy guy". There are frequent occasions when Cummings robs encounters between Paula and Elliot of their climatic value, only to leave the audience laughing at her feigned street-wise adulthood. Simon cunningly employs Cummings as a comic buffer between on the one hand the violent dislike Paula and Elliot share for each other, and, on the other hand, the passionate love they finally realize. Extremes are not important to this movie;

rather, Simon prefers to let humour buffet its way through storms, whether they be of hate or of love, always emerging as the one factor all can be sure of.

The Goodbye Girl is of the breed of what are now viewed as nostalgic films. It presents the audience with a delightful, charming love story, where the audience emerges remembering vividly and with smiles both scenes and even specific lines. This movie acts as a humorous buffer between the usual harsh world of movies and the concrete world of realities. It asserts the value of comedy today and is, ultimately, successfully funny.



Mount Saint Vincent Winter Carnival

"Snowball Express '78"

Hop on our express and join us in celebrating Winter Carnival '78. Tickets for all events and festivities can be purchased at the SUB Enquiry Desk or the Mount Student Union Office (443-4224). All functions are double stamp.

February 8th—Wednesday

Ryan's Fancy returns to the Mount! For those of you who missed their last performance at the Mount, be sure to get your tickets well in advance 'cause the night is sure to be an even bigger success than it was last semester. Tickets \$3.75. 9-1 p.m.

February 9th—Thursday

It's a night at the movies with an exciting one that will surely keep you in suspense—*The Deep!* 7-9 p.m. \$1.50 and that's not all.

For all of you Mount Women who want to let the men know how to play hockey, be prepared. They've decided to give you a 'break', and play without a goalie and even use their sticks upside down. Real sweet of them, ain't it?

February 10—Friday

It's LAS VEGAS NITE. Enjoy yourself at our casino as well as jiving to the best of the Bop Shoo Bop Review! Be sure not to miss this night of excitement! \$3.75. 9-1 p.m.

February 11th—Saturday

Are you ready for this—We're going to have a Pub Crawl and Car Rally combined. Want to find out more about it, just form a team of 4

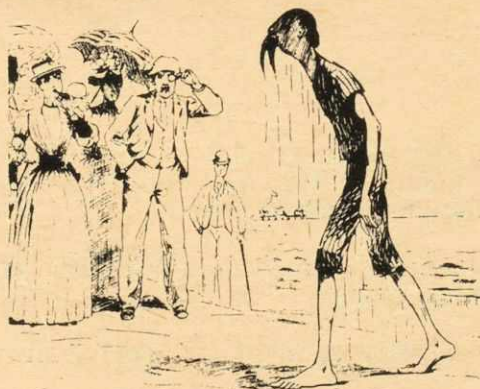
(driver, navigator and 2 drinkers) and pick up an entry form at the Office.

And on Saturday evening prepare yourself for the Valentine's Ball (sponsored by Science Society). Dancing from 9-1 p.m. to the sound of "Griffen".

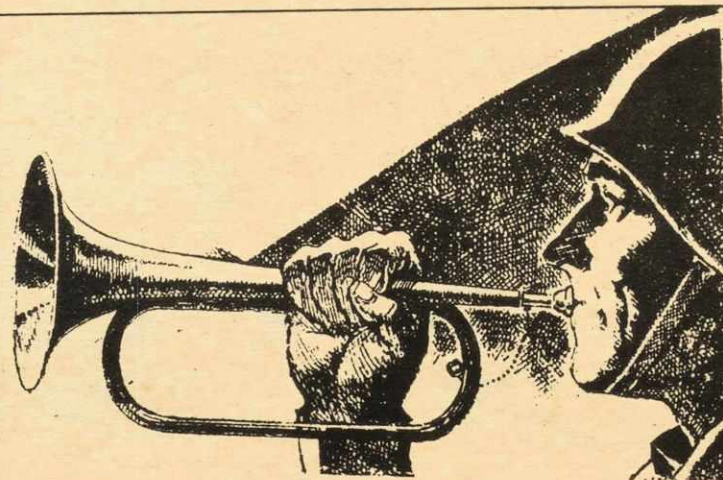
February 12th—Sunday

On Sunday we have a Day in the Snow (tobogganing, skating etc.). Get your group or society involved in our Snow Sculpture Contest. Entry forms can be picked up at the Student Union Office.

In the evening the cafeteria will be serving a special supper to all hungry participants and students. Following this, the pace will slow down to a Coffee House so you can all rest up for the upcoming week's work.



Get in the swim—Enjoy Goldfish



GRADS '78

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