

That's Life is emotional seesaw

That's Life
Columbia
Rialto

review by Dragos Ruiu

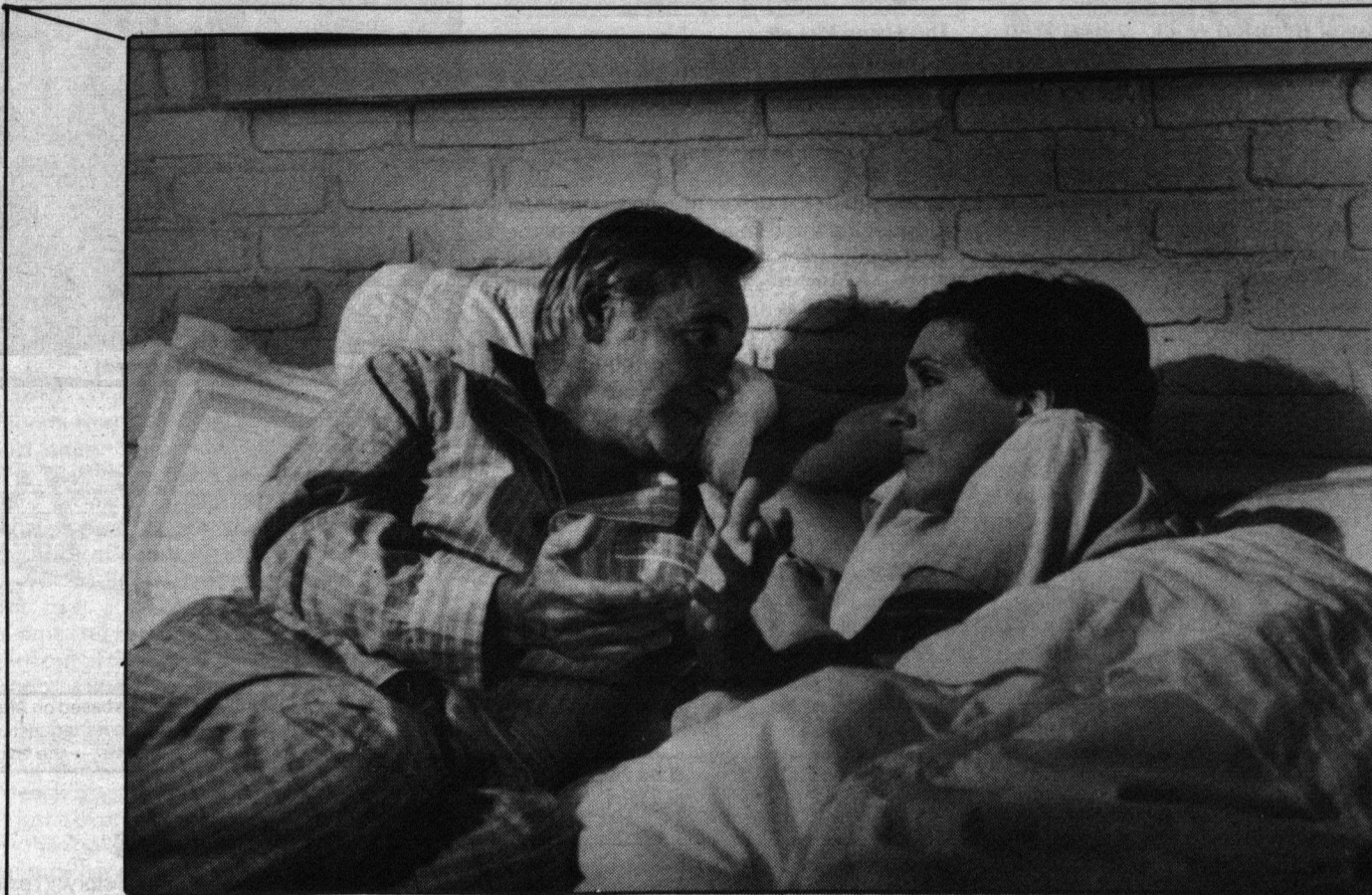
Blake Edwards' life must be slightly schizophrenic if his new movie *That's Life* is any indication of his own life. This movie has wonderful humour and touching drama, unfortunately they combine to form bland neutrality. He has made two movies and combined them. Together they clash.

This movie, as its title would lead one to believe, is about pregnancy and marriage, getting old, and life. Jack Lemmon plays the semi-senile, successful architect who cannot come to terms with his age. Julie Andrews (Blake Edwards' real life wife) plays Lemmon's singer wife who wanders throughout the film wondering if she has throat cancer, something that would end her next and possibly last tour.

Yep, this movie has it all, just like life. It has suspense, comedy, and drama. That is part of the problem with it. It tries to do too much in the two hour segment allotted to movies. As a result, the audience is called upon to change moods instantaneously. At one moment you're rolling in the aisle watching Jack Lemmon reading a passage in church about adultery — at the same time he is discovering to his great discomfort that he has crabs... Abruptly, the movie cuts to a shot of Andrews crying on the beach, wondering about her life and husband. Just as you stop laughing and you start empathizing with her, the bouncing brainless floozy from next door jogs into camera range.

From a cinematic point of view, this movie is acted and directed magnificently. The combined experience that Lemmon, Andrews, and Edwards bring to this film shows. The acting is superb and the camera catches it intimately. In one scene, we find the family reunited at the dinner table. They are each wrapped up in their own discussions, except for Julie Andrews who is wrapped in her own pain. The camera closes in on her and you really want to cry for her.

Despite the violent mood swings, the watcher does find himself laughing and crying with the action when it is humanly possible to change from extremes of the emo-



Blake Edwards' new flick definitely autobiographical

tional spectrum that fast. You feel for Julie Andrews when her world disintegrates, her husband turns grouchy and her kids lives are falling apart. And you split a gut laughing with Lemmon playing the lovable and barely tolerable crank. If the comedy had been separate from the drama, each would have made an outstanding movie.

In the middle of this movie it will dawn on you that 'elevator muzac' has been playing throughout. Henry Mancini's talent has certainly taken a leave of absence for this soundtrack composition. The other cinematic device that begins to grate on your nerves is that, to portray confusion, Edwards often has two characters talking at a few billion words

per minute, about different things. It works the first few times, but gets much worse the next few hundred, until it really annoys.

You walk out of this movie feeling as if some of the torment and humour truly come from Blake Edwards' life. Excluding his Pink Panther films, most of his movies are partly auto-biographical. For example, when Edwards felt screwed by Hollywood, he made *S.O.B.*, the phenomenally caustic satire of the film industry. *That's Life* reveals Edwards' impression of aging.

That impression is bitter, and most of the jokes stem from this bitterness. Lemmon's

character reminded me of Archie Bunker. Young people will find it hard to identify with the problems the characters in this movie encounter.

Perhaps the biggest surprise is that Andrews does not sing even one song, in spite of the fact that her character is a singer. This must be a cinema first for her. At the very end it looks like she is going to sing, but the movie ends before she can. As Maxwell Smart would say "Missed it by THAT much!"

This movie is worth seeing, but maybe not at \$5.50. Keep it in mind for those Ripoff-Tuesdays.

Flick worth peek ... just barely.

Children of a Lesser God
review of Lucien Cloutier

Children of a Lesser God is a love story with a difference. Sarah Norman (played by the beautiful Marlee Martin) is a withdrawn, frustrated, and lonely deaf woman who works as a cleaning lady at a school for the deaf somewhere in the U.S.A. William Hurt plays the part of James Leeds, a new teacher at the school. The two meet when James expresses concern over Sarah's limited ability to communicate. Though initially they don't get along, they eventually fall deeply in love. From this point on, the movie deals with the troubles they encounter when trying to communicate with each other — troubles caused not so much by physical difficulties, but rather by their inability to truly understand the world that the other is living in.

Children of a Lesser God deals with the tough class that James finds himself teaching and how he manages to reach out to most of them and how his students learn to respect him, both as an individual and as a fine teacher.

James' relationship with his students often leads to humorous situations and adds to the enjoyment of the movie.

While this movie has its moments, it also has its weak points too. First of all, the plot is very overworked. Boy meets girl, they fall in love, they break up, and in the end they decide that true love conquers all and they get back together. Second, their quick romance (one casual date) is not believable and we find ourselves struggling to remain open-minded.

Sarah and James fall in love too soon in the show, in the sense that we still don't know enough about the two main characters and

their diverse personalities. Instead, we are subject to a quicker-than-love-at-first-sight situation that takes away from the credibility of the movie. Also, the movie shows perhaps just one too many sex scenes (four in all) and the value of these intense and emotional scenes is decimated. All of this leads to a rather disappointing (and abrupt) ending where, despite the fact that they have not resolved their major conflict, James and Sarah get back together and live happily ever after. Left behind are a host of options that the producers/screenwriters could have used. We could have seen, first of all, a resolution of their differences. An interesting parallel could have been established between one of James' disobedient students and his love, Sarah; but this didn't happen either.

There were so many paths that this movie could have taken, but instead it chooses to merely fade away and you find yourself just a tiny bit disappointed and a tiny bit annoyed.

To its credit, I must say that *Children of a Lesser God* contains superb acting and was a very funny and emotional movie at times, and these qualities alone make the movie worth going to... but just barely.

As well, the parts of the story dealing with the relationship between James and his students are very good, mixing the qualities of humour and emotion well. In fact, had the movie only been concerned with this portion of the movie, then it would have been far superior (though totally different in meaning) to the current one.

Instead, unfortunately, we are left with a rather lukewarm product that is sure to receive moderate play before being forgotten about until the next 'B' movie hits the screen. Is *Children of a Lesser God* worth seeing? Yes, but again, just barely.

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