

The Color Purple

By AMY COPLAND

"YOU'RE BLACK, POOR, ugly and you're a woman. You're nothin." "I may be black, poor, ugly and a woman but at least I'm here. At least I'm alive."

This brief exchange reveals the strength, hope and endurance that runs as a determined current throughout Steven Spielberg's new film, *The Colour Purple*. The words themselves belong to Alice Walker, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel; from which the film was adapted, but the powerful effect that they have on an audience must be attributed to Spielberg. It is his skill as a director that has turned Walker's evocative prose into a masterpiece on celluloid.

The story is about Celie, a black girl who grows up in the deep South during the early

1900's. Her sister, Nettie, is the only source of compassion, tenderness and love in her otherwise heartless world.

By the time she is fourteen, Celie has had two children by her own father and has stood powerlessly by as he sold them for profit. Her father then "marries her off" to a man who wants nothing more than a cook, a housekeeper and a nursemaid for his children.

The desperate bond between Nettie and Celie is abruptly severed by Celie's new husband, whom she calls "Mister", and she enters a life of fear, abuse and humiliation at his hands. Celie, in a typical illustration of her indomitable hope, had made her sister promise to write letters, so that they would never be far apart. However, "Mister", in an equally typical illustration of his heartless brutality, hides all of the



letters that arrive for Celie. Nettie's parting vow that "only death can keep us apart" rings loud in Celie's ears throughout the long years of her sister's apparent silence.

The dogged determination that Celie reveals in her struggle to endure her solitude is also a characteristic of Whoopi Goldberg, the actress who portrays Celie. It is becoming well-known that Goldberg had read *The Colour Purple* long before she had ever heard of Spielberg, and had been so moved by the story of adversity and perseverance that she wrote to Alice Walker, telling her that if they ever made it into a movie, she would "play any part, even the dirt on the floor." It is likely that Goldberg could have played the dirt on the floor very convincingly, because she had been receiving recognition in progressive theatres in the U.S. and Europe by proving that she *could* portray anybody or anything. Tom Sabulis, a critic from New York, has written about Goldberg's one-woman theatre show where she becomes seventeen radically different characters, from "a spacey drug addict marvelling at airplane food ... to a blonde Valley Girl whose lifetime goal is to appear on the Love Boat ..."

Whoopi Goldberg's determination paid off when influential producers began to

notice her work, and Spielberg hired her.

Goldberg's attraction to *The Colour Purple* centered on the hope that Celie discovers when Shug Avery enters her life. Shug, played by Margaret Avery, is a flamboyant blues singer who is also "Mister's" lover. Shug recognizes the warmth and love that Celie is capable of and urges her to let it out. When she sings "Miss Celie's Blues," she emphasizes the line, "I think I'm somethin', I hope you think you're somethin' too!"

Celie is given added courage through her relationship with Sofia, played by Oprah Winfrey. Sofia fights for what she believes in, and actually stands up to "Mister" when he forbids her to marry his son, Harpo. This is in direct contrast to Celie, who says, "I don't know how to fight. All I know is how to survive." However, Sofia's iron will is completely broken when she has a confrontation with white townspeople and is subsequently beaten and thrown in jail. Eight years later, the shuffling, half-blind ghost that remains of the once vigorous, laughing Sofia gives Celie the courage to turn her submissive existence around.

Celie has learned to love herself through Shug, and she learns courage from Sophia, but it is her discovery that Nettie is still alive that provides her with the reason to finally stand up to "Mister".

Spielberg uses the image of the empty mailbox throughout the film to depict the emptiness of Celie's life without her sister. The mailbox is silhouetted against the evening sky, frozen by harsh winter storms and baked by the summer's heat, but it remains completely empty as the years pass. When Celie accidentally receives one of her sister's letters while "Mister's" attention is elsewhere, she realizes that he is responsible for her empty, lonely life. By keeping her sister's letter, "Mister" denied Celie the only source of love in her life. Now at long last, with her heart full of the promise of love, Celie has the strength to defy "Mister".

The emotional element of the movie soars at this point, and Celie's subjection and suffering give way to strength and direction. It is incredibly uplifting to witness the return of happiness and love to a film about human relationships, instead of the decline and fall that so many writers and directors have favoured in recent months. The two sisters come face to face in a field of bright purple flowers, their faces mirroring their wonder and delight at being together again. Celie is still black, poor, ugly and a woman but now she is happy.

The Colour Purple is a film that is not ashamed to affirm this happiness and love as the fundamental objectives of humanity. There is no deeper, or more complex theme than that.

BECOMING PARTNERS

Exploring our relationships

A weekend of discussion

Friday, Feb. 14 - 7:00 - 10:00 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 15 - 9:30 - 4:00 p.m.

For more information contact Avery Kempton at the chaplains' office, 424-2287.

Graduation Photography



Garey Pridham
STUDIO & GALLERY

Corner of Blowers & Grafton
422-9103

THE COHN

Let's spend the night together!

ODETTA

A star of Carpet The COHN, she's coming back to do more of her fabulous blues, ballads and spirituals.

☆ Date: Thursday, February 13 ☆

☆ Time: 8:00 ☆

☆ Price: \$12.50 ☆

(\$11.50 Sr. Cit & Stu.) ☆

Box Office Info 424-COHN
Charge-it Line 424-3820

Hours: Mon. - Fri. 10:00 - 6:00
Sat. 12:00 - 6:00
(VISA, M.C. phone orders)
\$1.00 per ticket handling to a maximum of \$5.00

Dalhousie Arts Centre - Nova Scotia's own.

Used & Rare Books



BACK PAGES

1520 Queen St.
Halifax
Nova Scotia
423-4750

MUSIC LESSONS

- GUITAR ● BANJO
- FLUTE ● MANDOLIN
- AUTOHARP ● BASS
- RECORDER ● FIDDLE

DAY & EVENING
NO REGISTRATION FEES

HALIFAX FOLKLORE CENTRE

1538 Brunswick St., Hfx. N.S.
(Just off Spring Garden Rd.)

423-7946