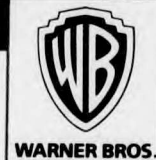


STEVEN SPIELBERG DIRECTS

By JANE HAWTIN



THE COLOR PURPLE

The Pulitzer Prize Winning Novel Comes To The Screen

There is a wonderful story behind how Whoopi Goldberg came to be the star of Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple*. According to Goldberg, "I was driving down the street

Celie. She is a young, oppressed, sexually abused, uneducated black girl. At the turn of the century she is 14 and though she is not a slave on a plantation, she is slave to a society which values women, or girl children, only for the amount of work, or number of men they

on the book, he was hooked. He says, "I began reading *The Color Purple* casually and I couldn't put it down. I got angry, I laughed, and then I cried. And as Celie's story came pouring down into the sunlight, I felt everything at once. It was one of the best pieces of reading I had picked up in years."

The Color Purple represents a departure from his box office hits *E.T.*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* or *Back to the Future*. Spielberg explains, "The human element has been present in all my films, especially *E.T.*, but *The Color Purple* is a departure for me in that it deals with emotional crisis and tremendous emotional growth, spanning almost 40 years in the lives of 8 characters."

Spielberg even changed his directing style for this film. He usually goes into production with every step of a movie storyboarded (drawn out with full instructions as to what happens, and where). For *The Color Purple* he claims he had no preconceptions and just shot according to how he felt that day. He explains, "I had disputes with my subconscious. My conscious might say, 'hey that's not the way to play this scene' but my subconscious surprised me everyday, telling me to just turn off my brain and go with it."

He also changed the script, with Meyjes, after each day's production. Whoopi Goldberg (she uses a fictitious name but won't say what her real one is) loved it. She says, "I am a sponge actor. I soak up some part of you that may come out later in a character. It's very subconscious and very weird. . . in fact I need total lunacy or I can't work. If I weren't an actor, I guess I would be certifiable."

Author Alice Walker, who was involved in the making of *Color Purple* says, "My hopes for the movie are that people will celebrate the spirit of Celie and Shug and the other characters. Celebrating being alive, struggling together and maintaining our connections with each other, even though it can be hard to do that."

"Maybe people will rethink their feelings about all the different kinds of love and the connections between love as we experience it between people and universal love." She was awarded the Pulitzer prize and the American Book Award for her story. No doubt Spielberg hopes he will earn equivalent awards, or at least the same respect, for putting the story on screen.



in Berkeley when Alice Walker came on the radio reading a section from her new book *The Color Purple*. It was a section in which Celie and Shug are discussing God. My kid made me pull over because I talk about God a lot, and she thought it was funny that somebody else was saying the same kind of stuff. So I knew I had to read it. I read this amazing book, and I sat down and wrote to Alice Walker, with my resume and all my reviews and references, telling her I would go *anywhere* to audition if this was made into a movie."

As it turned out Walker had seen Goldberg perform in a very small theatre in San Francisco and knew as soon as she came on stage that she had to play the part. Apparently she wrote back to Goldberg saying, "I know who you are. I've been to your shows and I've already suggested you for the role."

The Color Purple tells the story of

can 'do'. Celie is given by Pa to a horrible man who beats her. It is only her wry sense of humor and immense love for her sister that keeps her alive.

The abuser, simply called Mr. is played by Danny Glover. The role is in stark contrast to the character of the cotton farmer he created for Sally Field's *Places in the Heart*. Adolph Caesar, hot off *A Soldier's Story* is Mr.'s father and Margaret Avery plays Shug, the one bit of sparkle in Celie's life.

The screenplay was written by an almost total unknown, Menno Meyjes. He has only three films to his credit but one called *Lionheart*, about the 13th century children's crusades, caught Spielberg's eye and Meyjes got the nod.

Making a movie like *The Color Purple* was a unique experience for Spielberg. He even admits that initially he didn't want to direct it. Spielberg isn't much of a reader, but once he got started