

# Films depict principal, rodent rescuers, mugging miner

NEW YORK (NC) — Despite charges that it whitewashes its protagonist's controversial tactics, John G. Avildsen's "Lean on Me" (Warner Bros.) is a feel-good movie pumped up to perfection by Morgan Freeman's rousing performance as Joe Clark.

Without giving personal background on the Paterson, N.J., principal who wields a bullhorn and baseball bat, the film jumps right into Clark's mission to clean up his drug-, crime- and graffiti-infested school. He gets a mandate to raise the kids' bottom-of-the-barrel reading scores when he is transferred from a bucolic, all-white elementary school to a predominantly black and Hispanic hellhole. He kicks 300 of the worst offenders out of school, chains the doors to bar drug dealers and bullies, and suspends teachers who dare question his militaristic tactics.

By the end of the film, the school's halls are clean and tidy, kids respect and depend on Joe Clark for his savvy counsel, teachers are smiling and test scores skyrocket. To Clark, school pride and self-pride are indistinguishable.

Joe Clark could ask for no better film "biographer" than Avildsen, the man who gave us "Rocky" and "The Karate Kid." And as played by Freeman, Clark is an indomitable spirit. His only real adversary, a shrill community mom (Lynne Thigpen), is finally drowned out by the students who march en masse to city hall to protest Clark's incarceration for violating fire codes with the door chains.

Clark's heroics may be simplistic, but they're great crowd pleasers. Unlike "Stand and Deliver," "Lean on Me"



High school principal Joe Clark, played by Morgan Freeman, makes a point to one of his students on the roof of the school in a scene from the movie "Lean on Me."

## 'The Rescuers'

Based on stories by Margery Sharp, "The Rescuers" (Buena Vista) is a re-release of a 1977 Disney animated feature directed by Wolfgang Reitherman. The plot revolves around two cute mice, Bernard and Bianca, members of the International Rescue Aid Society who are dispatched to rescue an orphan girl from the wicked Madame Medusa's beached Mississippi sternwheeler in a dark Louisiana bayou.

The action, fast and at times perhaps too frightening for very small tots, is consistently entertaining, and helped along by imaginative human and animal characters and pleasantly orchestrated songs.

For adults the film offers enough sophisticated wit in the visual characterizations and voice accompaniment — principally by Bob Newhart, Eva Gabor and Geraldine Page — to add a mature dimension to the basic Disney family film.

Purists, recalling such Disney classics as "Snow White" and "Fantasia," may find the animation quality somewhat pale by comparison. But for general audiences young and old, "The Rescuers" offers an adventure fantasy that most will find quite enjoyable.

The USCC classification is A-I — general patronage. The MPAA rating is G — general audiences.



Miss Bianca (left) and Bernard set out to rescue a kidnapped girl in the animated Disney comedy-adventure "The Rescuers."

plays fast and loose with the facts, promoting Clark's ends-justify-the-means philosophy. Fearless, funny and nasty, Clark is depicted as selflessly consumed with the kids' well-being. Regardless of the film's accuracy in depicting him, the real Joe Clark, who is the subject of much speculation in New Jersey, can only benefit from Avildsen's glossy public-relations effort.

Although too rough for young children, the film will speak to older adolescents, especially those in ethnic urban neighborhoods who might be inspired by the positive values and personal integrity professed by the dynamic, unconventional black authority figure Freeman portrays.

Due to much rough language, some violence and menace and a flash of nudity, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

## 'Bert Rigby'

The talents of British song-and-dance man Robert Lindsay are showcased in "Bert Rigby, You're a Fool" (Warner Bros.), a clumsy, show biz rags-to-riches fable.

With Lindsay, who recently wowed audiences on Broadway in "Me and My Girl," and writer-director Carl Reiner on board, one would think this film had all the fixings for a sure-fire hit. Unfortunately, Reiner seems to have forgotten what made his timeless autobiographical play and movie "Enter Laughing" work so well.

In "Rigby," Reiner concocts a flimsy, almost insultingly adolescent storyline showing an English coal miner mug, croon and pratfall his way up the ladder of success in Hollywood. Lindsay makes a charming, attractive screen debut. But Reiner tries too hard to show off his star's incredible ability to mimic everyone from Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton to Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire in bits of business pulled from their best films. As a result, Lindsay is deterred from developing his

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own screen persona, and we are treated to non-stop, ingratiating copycat song-and-dance routines that are poorly dubbed and haphazardly injected into the screenplay.

Reiner also tries too hard to speak to what he mistakenly believes is the common-denominator movie audience. So, in between the strictly family-oriented entertainment numbers, he sandwiches a load of gratuitous sexual innuendo and vulgar references, pop musician name-dropping and product endorsements. We are also treated to a pointless, interminable Elvis parody and a Shakespearean condom commercial, among other "in-jokes."

In attempting both to be trendy and to move his star from stage to screen in the fastest possible manner, Reiner has misjudged his audience and his star and produced a mishmash that should interest few and bore many.

It is to Lindsay's credit that he rises above his derivative material and succeeds in this "screen test" as a squeaky clean, amiable character. While his talents are powerful on the stage, he will need special handling if he is to make a successful transition to film, perhaps in a screen bio of the silent film stars he mimics so well. The highlight of this film is a clever TV commercial for running shoes featuring Lindsay as Buster Keaton. Otherwise, "Bert Rigby" is both a fool and a flop.

Due to some rough language laced with sexual vulgarities, much sexual innuendo and brief nudity, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

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