

Film 'rip-off' offers little beyond cast's footwork

An obvious rip-off of "Fame," "Dirty Dancing" and "Flashdance," "Sing" (Tri-Star) has little original material to recommend it except its cast of energized teens and their fancy footwork.

Since its script by Dean Pitchford ("Footloose") plays more like a patchwork quilt than a reality-based story about Brooklyn's annual "Sing" high school competitions, most viewers will dismiss the film as pure fantasy. In fact, these performance contests, which originated in Brooklyn in the late 1940s, have apparently showcased such future stars as Barbra Streisand, Neil Diamond and other notables.

In any case, the film showcases Elvis-look-alike Dominic Zametti (Peter Dinklage), a young hood who must choose between co-directing his senior class Sing competition or a lucrative life of petty crime. His Sing co-director, Hannah Gottschalk (Jessica Steen), is a good girl whose whiny, widowed mom, Rosie

(Louise Lasser), oddly can't see her daughter's many positive graces.

Of course, there's the inevitable infatuation between these two unlikely teens. Dominic starts out bad by mugging his spirited new teacher, Miss Lombardo (Lorraine Bracco), and standing guard as his lowlife brother steals money from Rosie's diner. But after a few pointed threats from Miss Lombardo and growing respect for Hannah, he redirects his energy into Sing. He also exhibits some less-than-showstopping dancing talent.

An intriguing but weakly developed subplot about the kids' dying Brooklyn neighborhood ends up inspiring the narrative's only suspense, when the Sing competition is cancelled at the last minute by the school board's decision to close the aged school.

Director Richard Baskin uses music-video flourishes to divert attention from the film's messy plot. And although the strong feeling of community pride and school spirit shared by the kids, their teachers and



Students dance in "Sing," a story about Brooklyn's annual "Sing" high school competitions. NC News

parents is admirable, it's presented in maudlin fashion. But, all in all, the kids are good kids and the film's heart is in the right place. Dominic also makes an anti-drug statement when he rejects his brother's offer of cocaine.

Due to some rough language and sexually suggestive dancing, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Novel

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him "Joshua," said Sister Rossi, who met the priest/author at a retreat at Stella Maris Retreat Center in Skaneateles last summer. "He was so low key. His whole delivery — it was just like Joshua in the book."

As a result of that retreat, Sister Rossi recommended that Father Girzone be invited to Most Precious Blood. Sister Roberta Rodenhouse, RSM, pastoral assistant at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Greece, also first met Father Girzone at the Stella Maris retreat. She too was impressed by him.

"He is a humble, simple person," Sister Rodenhouse observed. "You could see so much of him in the character of Joshua."

But what inspired the parish staff at St. Charles to invite Father Girzone to speak there last Oct. 11 was the volume of *Joshua* sales during a Lenten book sale earlier in the year, Sister Rodenhouse said. "We just kept ordering it and ordering it, and it kept selling," she noted.

According to Sister Rodenhouse, approximately 1,000 people attended the lecture. She said for the most part people received the talk well, but that a few faulted the priest for being too critical of the church.

"I guess I would almost compare him to a Father Charles Curran almost in the way he is rocking the boat, but in a different way," Sister Rodenhouse observed. The book, she added, "speaks to us of what the church really could be or should be." As a result of his outspokenness, Father Girzone has gone to parishes "where the pastor has not even acknowledged him," she reported.

Father Blighton compared Joshua — and Father Girzone — to the Old Testament prophets.

"They didn't (find fault) out of a desire to reject the institution, they did it out of a love for the institution," Father Blighton said. "I think there's an important distinction between someone who just criticizes

and walks out and someone who sticks with it, but criticizes and speaks the truth."

"What I was trying to get across is not to make (Joshua) so much critical of the church as (of) the model the hierarchy has used to run the church," Father Girzone acknowledged. For example, the author noted that in the book, he deliberately had Joshua call the pope "Peter" to make clear that he was not challenging the 2,000 year history of authority in the church.

"He is still Peter," Father Girzone declared. "People realize you have to have authority, but people are sensitive to how that authority is exercised in the name of Christ."

According to Father Faraone, one objection raised at his parish during discussion of the book is Joshua's lack of commitment to one particular community. "One of the disadvantages that we noted is that if part of your definition of church is a family, he needed to be connected to a church, to a family," he said.

"The book does picture Joshua as a marginal person," Father Blighton allowed. "He is an artist. He is living a life different from other people."

"But so is Jesus," he continued. "He's going from place to place with a few select people. He never settles down. There is also Jesus in the Gospel saying, 'Who are my mother and brothers? The people who follow the Gospel.'"

And, it appears, people have also begun following Father Girzone, Mack noted. "There are people in Rochester, who if they hear Father Girzone will be at St. Theodore's, they'll go, if they hear he'll be at St. Charles, they'll go."

Father Girzone remarked that he had not anticipated the response either to the book or to himself, and observed that demands on him as a speaker have taken their toll. Since *Joshua's* publication, he has been forced to resume taking medication for an illness that forced him to retire from active priestly ministry seven years ago, and in the future he will limit the number of talks, workshops and retreats he gives by picking

sites where people from several parishes or towns can gather. On May 12 and 13, for example, he will speak at DeSales High School in Geneva, drawing his audience from several parishes in the area.

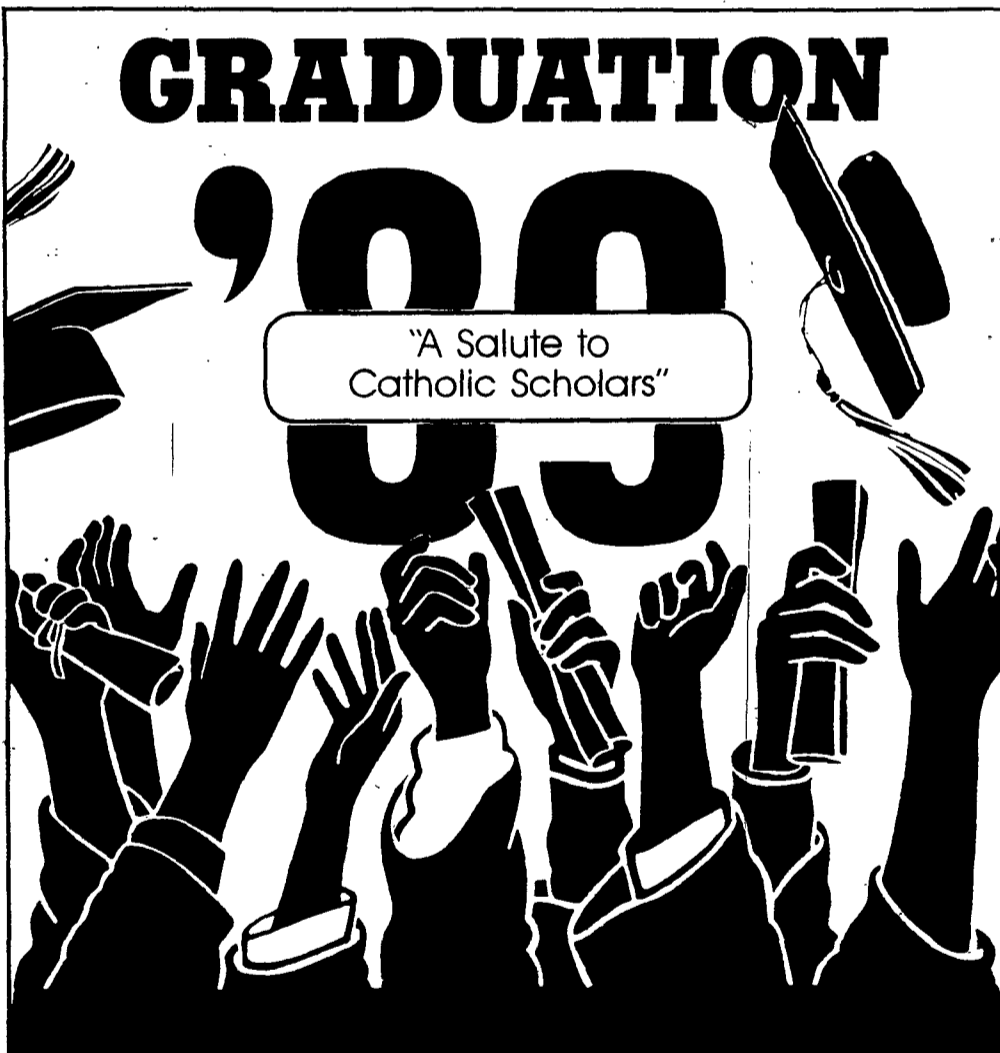
In addition, Father Girzone has been cautious about how the book is to be used. For example, he said he has not sold the movie rights to the book to anyone thus far because he wants a guarantee that the producers would "keep the movie faithful to the theology of the book," which is centered in Catholic teachings, the Gos-

pels, and in Christ.

Meanwhile, *Joshua's* popularity continues to spread "geometrically," Father Girzone said. "More and more pockets of readers are getting interested in it. They read it and send copies to friends."

Father Blighton attributed this pattern of sales to the nature of the book.

"It elicits a personal response," Father Blighton said. "It's not written as a dry treatise. It's not written in a formal literary form. It's written as an image that captures people's attention and evokes a response."



In recognition of the Catholic high school seniors of the Rochester Diocese, the Catholic Courier will be featuring a special graduation supplement in the issue of June 1, 1989.

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