

Entertainment

Movie review - 'Awakenings'

By DIAHANN NADEAU
Herald Special

Robin Williams and Robert De Niro star in this powerful exploration of mental illness.

Based on the work by Dr. Oliver Saks, *Awakenings* is the true story of a summer of miraculous awakenings among seemingly catatonic patients in a Bronx, New York, hospital.

Williams plays Dr. Sayer, a nervous young researcher whose entire medical experience has taken place in labs, on subjects such as earthworms and mice. In 1969 he mistakenly applies for a job at Bainbridge Hospital, discovering they only have people for him to work with. Desperately understaffed, the board hires him despite their mutual trepidations.

Sayer is initially horrified by his patients - they are lifeless beings in wheelchairs with no recognition of the world outside their bodies. A bored staff makes no effort to communicate nor thinks of improving conditions. Sayer accidentally discovers that his patients have reflexes and from then on is motivated to uncover the truth behind the variety of disorders listed on their charts.

Enter Leonard Lowe, (De Niro), a patient whose mother still visits him daily, and who manages to communicate through an Ouija board. His intelligence shines through the brief message (he invokes Rilke's Panther), and when Sayer hears of a breakthrough new drug he chooses Leonard to experiment on. The result is nothing short of miraculous.

Leonard's awakening, and the subsequent awakening of his fellow patients, is incredibly moving. Brought back into a world most of them left over 30 years earlier, their reactions are intense and involving. It is an exhilarating part of the film, and director Penny Marshall has managed to avoid over-sentimentalizing the episode. Unfortunately, the drug is not all it is cracked up to be and the patients face a terrible reality.

De Niro is superb. His depiction of a proud and intelligent man undone by his own brain is exceedingly credible and moving. Through the various stages of his illness we forget it is De Niro, he is simply Leonard.

Williams is terrific as Sayer, an intensely shy man who has

almost no experience of people - either as friends or patients. Williams manages to give a shining dramatic performance, curbing all the familiar comic ties that made him famous.

The supporting cast is excellent, with Julie Kavner as Nurse Costello, John Heard as another doctor, Penelope Ann Miller as Paula, Max Von Sydow as an obnoxious lecturing chemist, and the wonderful Dexter Gordon as a patient/pianist. Ruth Nelson is marvelous as Leonard's mother.

Awakenings is a little long and sometimes drags a bit, but on the whole it is a gripping and moving drama, that is both life affirming and profoundly sad. It is worth watching for De Niro alone - but everyone else more than holds their own.

A 'hoot of a time'

KLEINBURG - Besides their well known call, screech owls also make a barking sound or a soft whistle. These small owls are featured in a night-time event offered by the Kortright Centre for Conservation on Saturday, March 9 at 6:30 p.m. and 9 p.m.

Start the evening with a look at some live owls on loan from Springwater Provincial Park. After a slide show on Ontario owls, presented by wildlife specialist Dan Stuckey, you can learn how to imitate various owl calls. Then

naturalists lead the way on a short walk into the woods, where you can try your skill at calling owls.

Advance tickets are required for this special evening event. Call (416) 832-2289.

The Kortright Centre is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Follow the signs: Take Highway 400 to Major Mackenzie Drive (at Canada's Wonderland) go west 3 km to Pine Valley Drive, then south 1 km.

For more information call (416) 661-6600.

G.L.T. auditions

Auditions are being held for Georgetown Little Theatre's next play, "Lunch Hour" by Jean Kerr, on Monday, March 4th, 8 p.m. at 33 Stewarttown Road.

The play is a comedy revolving around a young girl and a marriage guidance counsellor whose wife is having an affair with the girl's husband. After much ado, the play ends happily, but not before the audience has had a good laugh!

The characters are as follows: Oliver, a 45ish, good-looking but cold psychiatrist; Carne, a

young, naive girl in her 20's; Nora, Oliver's wife, elegant and beautiful in her 30's; Peter, Carne's husband, is late 40's, arrogant and selfish; and Leonard, the landlord, ageless and Carne's friend, who also has a "thing" for Nora, who tries to get the couples back together.

If you would like to audition, please phone Joyce Holland at 873-6211 for more information.

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