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The stern monsignor Burke (Charles Durning) and Father Farley (Jack Lemmon) share a light moment in the Universal Studios release — Mass Appeal. The movie is currently playing at the Thornhill Cinemas.

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Markham Movie Scene

Lemmon stars in Mass Appeal

By IAN BAILEY
MASS APPEAL: The main blessing in this adaptation of Brian Davis' play of the same name is Jack Lemmon's wildly elastic performance as a Catholic priest facing a personal crisis.

Lemmon plays Father Tim Farley, a priest at an affluent Catholic church in California. Farley is the Johnny Carson of the pulpit. He has reduced the rituals of faith to a slick, calculating TV-level of maximum entertainment and minimal challenge.

Father Farley's rules for keeping the faith involve homogenizing the church experience for his congregation. He makes his sermons fast and entertaining. (The congregation's response, says Farley, is the receipts of the collection plate; or the "Nielsen rating after the sermon.") Consolation should be inane and faith should be fun.

Lemmon is quite successful at depicting this irreverent side of Tim Farley. He offers a grand, energetic performance, ranging smoothly between Farley's wisecracking highs and his deep lows as he realizes that comforting his congregation without intellectually or morally challenging them has created a flock impatient with hard reality.

If Farley is the Johnny Carson of the priesthood, then Mark Dolson (Zeljko Ivanek), a young seminarian assigned to his parish, is Phil Donahue. Dolson is serious, principled, outspoken and — as played by Ivanek — as boringly impassive as a brick wall. He's an angry young man who often seems painfully whinny. In a film that is not quite as strong as its stars' performance, he and Charles Durning (who plays a calculating monsignor) seem consigned to the necessary role of providing straightmen for Lemmon to play off. (PG) ** 1/2 THORNHILL SQUARE

rival Antonio Salieri (Tom Hulce (Mozart) and F. Murray Abraham (Salieri) have both been nominated for the same Best Actor Oscar. (PG) ****

HEAVEN HELP US: Teenage hijinks at a Catholic high school in the 1960s. (AA: Coarse Language) NOT RATED

MARKVILLE BEVERLY HILLS COP: Eddie Murphy stars in this first-rate urban thriller/comedy as a Detroit detective hunting a buddy's killers in Beverly Hills. Nominated for the Best Original Screenplay Oscar. (R) ****

MICKI & MAUDE: Dudley Moore is a bigamist with two pregnant wives (Amy Irving and Ann Reinking). Mainly fun but saddled with a weak ending. (PG) **

MISCHIEF: Imagine what would have happened if Beaver Cleaver and Arthur (The Fonzy) Fonzarelli had met in the 1950s and got to talking about girls and sex. That seems the unspoken premise of this good-natured but sketchy comedy about a tough stud (newcomer Chris Nash) who tries to teach a sensitive nerd (Doug McKeon) about women. (AA: Coarse Language, Sexual Activity) **

MRS. SOFFEL: In 1906, the warden's wife at a Pittsburgh prison falls in love with a deathrow prisoner, helps him and his brother escape and goes on the lam with them. This film is an exceptional and poignant tale of doomed love that culminates in an ironic ending as gloomy as the deft depiction of turn-of-the-century Pittsburgh. Diane Keaton is touching as the warden's wife and Mel Gibson, coming from his inexpressive turn in "The River", is a pleasant surprise as the manipulative convict. This fine entertainment was directed by Gillian Armstrong and partially filmed in Toronto last year. Look for Old City Hall standing in for the prison. (AA: Occasional Violence) ***

RATINGS

****-Excellent ***-Good **-Fair *-Poor



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