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### An Unexpected Opus

When one thinks of a high school music teacher, it's almost as if they are frozen in time. Each teacher leads music, teaches students to play, gives them grades, and manages to pull out a decent performance in the end. In *Mr. Holland's Opus* directed by Stephen Herek, this idea is challenged through a heartwarming and relatable performance by Richard Dreyfuss.

*Mr. Holland's Opus* follows the life of Glenn Holland, a high school music teacher who initially intended teaching to be a temporary "gig." His real work, he believes, is composing music; teaching was just a way to pay bills. Throughout the film, he realizes; however that teaching, not composing, is his real work. Through a relatable plot and sensitive moments, this film conveys a great message that is sure to warm the hearts of music lovers.

As the movie begins, Holland (Richard Dreyfuss) and his wife Iris (Glenne Headly) are a couple inspired by his potential success. Both are certain he will be successful, but when financial instability takes hold of the couple and Holland is forced to take the teaching job, hard-edged principal (Olympia Dukakis) looks him over and informs him that teaching is a job to be taken seriously, and will require the majority of his time. On his first encounter with his orchestra it is obvious he has a project ahead of him, as their attempt to play Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is unrecognizable. While he's teaching, the Holland's have a son, to Iris's delight and Glenn's more hesitant pleasure, which later turns to disappointment when he finds that their son, Cole, is deaf and will never hear his opus which he still believes will be his biggest accomplishment. After a series of events that follow, all the components of his life help him to

realize that he was incorrect in believing his symphony to be his sole purpose and that he accomplished something much greater.

The character of Glenn Holland is easy to relate to as many individuals often achieve success in areas other than what was originally intended. The character also grows on the viewer as we see his life progress and his love of teaching grow. At the beginning he was a lack-luster teacher who taught from the book and often had little enthusiasm in the subject matter, but as the film progressed and he learned from his mistakes, he becomes a teacher who personalizes the information to his subjects and makes the viewers excited to see where the story goes. This idea is also evident as he teaches his students to be better. One example is his attempt to teach a hopelessly untalented band member to play the clarinet. At the beginning he lacks the needed patience and isn't sure how to help her and it isn't until she is about ready to give up that he realizes that by restoring her self-esteem she can become successful. She appears several years later as a successful woman that learned much more than music in his class. It's moments like these where the audience can connect with the film and the theme that music is an essential part of the educational process and often teaches far more than how to play an instrument.

Stephen Herek has done a phenomenal job in creating emotion in the film. Through many ways he is able to evoke emotion from the viewers and this captures their attention. The plot in and of itself is one that viewers will inevitably connect with, but through thematic elements Herek ensures that they are ensnared in his film's plot. The music is triumphant from the beginning and gives the idea that the movie is going to make the audience feel good. The orchestrated music helps to set the tone of the movie and continues to do so for the different parts of the film. The music choice fits well with the historical context of the film and accompanies the plot in a way that makes the theme even stronger. Not only does he choose music that is

historically accurate and popular during the era, he also includes clips of historical events and these help the viewer to understand what time period this film is taking place. These historical clips include scenes from the Vietnam War, scenes from Woodstock, and general scenes depicting the use of drugs and alcohol that so often took place in this era. Herek goes above and beyond expected as he doesn't stop there; his casting choices also play a significant role in the success of the film. Richard Dreyfuss, who is sometimes too exuberant in his roles, finds the right balance for Mr. Holland. His physical transformations over the 30 years are convincing.. Glenne Headly has the role of his wife, and surprises the audience with her emotion and convincing role in the film. The supporting cast is equally strong, especially Jay Thomas as the football coach who becomes Holland's lifelong friend. The elements in the film cohesively work together to make this film the successful heart warmer that it has embodied.

Through emotional scenes, a personable plot, and thematic and contextual content; Stephen Herek has brought to light a film that is likely to warm the hearts of music lovers everywhere and truly make viewers believe and understand the role that music and its teachings never end.