

★ ★ ★ ★ My Left Foot

Oaks Six East

This is the story of Christy Brown, a hard-drinking and abrasive Irishman who rises up from obscurity to gain acclaim for his artistic ability in writing and painting.

Christy's childhood is colorful but typical. His family is poor but loving; his father is full of bluster but basically good. Christy plays football with the boys and flirts with the girls.

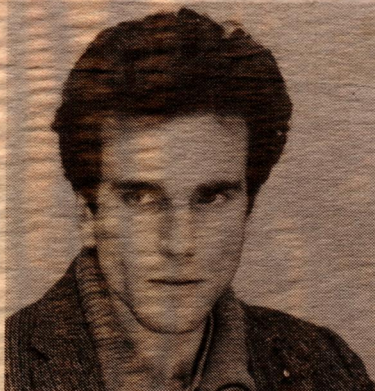
And, oh yes, Christy (Daniel Day-Lewis) has cerebral palsy. It is the great achievement of *My Left Foot* that this is just one of many facts about his life.

Christy's obstacles are enormous: The only part of his body he can control with any dexterity is his left foot. We follow him from a childhood where Christy is written off as a half-wit by everyone but his mother (Brenda Fricker) to an adult career as a great artist.

In between are countless physical and emotional challenges, but Christy's achievements never seem "inspiring" or "heartwarming." The movie's too good for that. It's simply a funny, fascinating story told with honesty.

Director Jim Sheridan achieves this in two ways. First, the story is astutely presented in flashbacks. Christy is the guest of honor at a fund-raiser, and the nurse who is sitting with him reads his recently published biography throughout the afternoon. Since we are aware from the beginning that Christy will accomplish as much as any man could hope, there is no falsely dramatic sense of, "Will he overcome the odds?"

Secondly, the movie spends



time with the entire Brown family, not just Christy. In fact, *My Left Foot* is as much about how mothers never want to see their sons grow up as anything else. Because Christy is physically challenged, his mother gets that unconscious wish granted for quite a long time. He becomes successful and still remains dependent on her and she is openly jealous of any woman who catches his eye. Fricker's performance is subtle and quite deserving of the Oscar nomination she's received.

But at the center of it all is Daniel Day-Lewis. He gives a technically brilliant performance, which should come as no surprise. Day-

Lewis shot to prominence with his one-two punch of *A Room With A View* and *My Beautiful Laundrette*. He played, respectively, a priggish Englishman and an earthy, lower-class gay man. Day-Lewis was so commanding in each role that it was a while before audiences realized both characters were portrayed by the same actor.

Then came *Stars and Bars*, a failed comedy (no one's perfect) and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, one of the great films of the past decade in which Day-Lewis — through sheer force of will — turned himself into a sexually magnetic doctor living in Czechoslovakia.

Christy might very well be his best achievement yet. It is a fierce and funny performance under the most strenuous circumstances. Day-Lewis is in the tradition of Laurence Olivier and probably his equal. He is a great character actor who can carry an entire film and will gracefully segue into finely tuned supporting roles late in his career. There, I've said it: He is the new Olivier. I'll just keep saying that for the next 20 years and eventually people will agree with me.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ