

"Music Within" brings us the true story of Richard Pimentel

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Sign up for: [Globe Headlines e-mail](#) | [Breaking News Alerts](#) Pimentel was born in Portland, Ore., in 1947 to a mentally ill mother (Rebecca De Mornay, overwrought) who sent him to a foster home. ("I was passed around like an unwanted Christmas fruitcake," he narrates.) Eventually, young Richard discovers he wants to be a public speaker, wins a number of high school oration contests, and, by 1969, enrolls in college. The university's speech coach (Hector Elizondo) tells him he lacks conviction and that he ought to "earn a point of view." So Richard joins the Army and goes to Vietnam, where he loses his hearing.

Because the filmmakers choose to depict Pimentel as a righteously driven man with a cause, the movie doesn't go very deep into Pimentel's trauma. Things seem at their worst for him in a scene where Richard can't hear a post-class discussion about Ken Kesey. But "Music Within" is a can-do movie, so in the next scene he learns to read lips. Not much later he forms a fast friendship with Art (Michael Sheen), a genius student with cerebral palsy whose deliberate speech Richard can actually hear. One afternoon he loses his grip on Art's wheelchair at a roller rink, and what do you know. It hits Christine (Melissa George), the sexually liberated woman with whom Richard will spend the rest of the movie.

The story dutifully hits all the highlights. Richard quits his insurance agency job to help other veterans find work. He stands up for Art against a nasty restaurant waitress. He turns to Elizondo to help him craft his manifesto, and Elizondo, playing someone on lithium, tells us what this movie is all about: "You don't need to change people's minds about disability. You need to change people's minds about themselves." And so the rest of "Music Within" is devoted to Richard's lecturing, speechifying, and right-hook judgments ("Buy yourself a conscience!").

None of this can happen without some melodrama. As Richard successfully changes attitudes toward the disabled, his personal relationships take an obligatory nosedive and his formerly tidy, vice-less house becomes a mess. Whose overflowing ashtray is that, anyway? And, yeah, how did Art let himself into the living room? Some of the performances aren't bad. Sheen, who played Tony Blair in "The Queen," actually manages the difficult feat of being technically impressive and quite moving. Meanwhile, Livingston confidently smoothes over the movie's clichés as though he doesn't know that's what they are.