

The Absent Ally Sheedy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
 the end of January, the fact is that, if the preview performances are any indication, audience members hoping to see Ms. Sheedy may very well end up with Mr. Leitch. While Mr. Leitch, the son of 1960's folk singer Donovan, arguably turns in a better performance than Ms. Sheedy, it's not his picture that the producers have been using to sell tickets. Newspaper ads for the show do indicate in small print, "Special appearance by Donovan Leitch as Hedwig at certain performances." Originally scheduled to do the Wednesday evening 8 P.M. show, he is also doing the 11 P.M. show on Fridays, as well as any performances Ms. Sheedy happens to miss. It seems Mr. Leitch anticipates being on stage fairly often. He lives two hours upstate in Woodstock, N.Y., with his wife, supermodel Kirsty Hume, and said, "I need to find my own place in the city, because I keep crashing with friends."

Ms. Sheedy was not available for a formal interview. "Ms. Sheedy is not talking to the press," said Mr. D'Ambroso. "I talked to her publicist, and when Ally found out that there was a journalist wanting to speak to her, she freaked out. She's in rehearsal mode right now, and she got so much bad press from the Brat Pack days. And I can't let you talk to the producers, either, because then it

could get really ugly."

But the Brat Pack days, when Ms. Sheedy starred with Molly Ringwald et al., in *The Breakfast Club*, would seem to be safely behind her. After a decade of dissing Hollywood and bating the usual personal demons, Ms. Sheedy emerged in sure-footed comeback mode with her role as Lucy Berliner, a heroin-addicted lesbian photographer, in this year's indie film hit, *High Art*. She received best actress awards from the Los Angeles Film Critics' Association and the National Society of Film Critics. Her next film, a comedy titled */// Take You There*, directed by actress Adrienne Shelly, will be featured at the Hamptons International Film Festival. Cozily ensconced with husband David Lindsay, an actor, and their 5-year-old daughter in their Upper West Side home, the 37-year-old Ms. Sheedy has no shortage of fans in the city in which she grew up.

Then came Hedwig. Ms. Sheedy was first introduced to the show in January at the Sundance Film Festival, where she met John Cameron Mitchell, who wrote *Hedwig* (with composer Stephen Trask) and starred as the first Hedwig. According to *The New York Times*, Mr. Mitchell showed Ms. Sheedy a videotape of the musical, and she replied, "I'd really love to do a show like that." Mr.

Mitchell said, "You know I really want a woman to do that show. Do you want to do it?" According to the show's Web site (Hedwig.com), Mr. Mitchell's first female choice, Sandra Bernhard, turned it down, and Martha Plimpton, whom he also considered at Sundance, told him, "Oh, my God, I couldn't!"

"They came to me to do a couple of nights a week to take the pressure off her. The first week, I ended up doing all the shows."

—singer *Dorovan Leitch*

Ms. Sheedy accepted, but in early September there were signs of trouble. She told *The Times*, "I feel like going out of my mind. I don't know whose idea this was. I can't dance, can't sing, and I can't act. I'm waiting for them to fire me." At the time, it seemed like false modesty.

Ms. Sheedy missed the first night of previews. She missed the next seven performances. Jennifer Phillips, an usher, told *The Observer*, "Ally was supposed to start on Sept. 13, but she pushed it back a week. She said she wanted to save her voice. In the beginning, she was shy with the audience and a lot of people weren't into her in the role. She was nervous."

Mr. Leitch, lead singer of the downtown rock group Nancy Boy, was originally scheduled to make a weekly special appearance on Wednesday nights. "They came to me to do a couple of nights a week to take the pressure off her," he said. "The first week, I ended up doing all the shows. Back-to-back shows are hard [for her], especially without a singing background. She just wasn't there yet, rehearsal wise."

Mr. Leitch, who refers to himself as "the underdog," was optimistic about the leading lady. "She's definitely going for it. She got the vocal coach, and she's working her ass off. I know there are a lot of people going to see her. She's definitely selling the tickets. Maybe it's a little easier on me than it is on her." On Friday evening, Oct. 8, six nights before opening night, a hip crowd milled in front of the door of the Jane Street Theater for the 11 P.M. show. Ms. Sheedy had done the 8 P.M. performance that night, but Mr. Leitch would be doing the late show. There were several female couples in the crowd. According to Ms. Phillips, the usher, "Ally had a huge lesbian following."