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**Speriamo Che Sia Femmina
(Let's Hope It's A Girl)
(ITALIAN-FRENCH-COLOR)**

A C.D.E. release. Produced by Giovanni Di Clemente for Clemi Intl. Prods. and Producteurs Associés. Directed by Mario Monicelli. Stars Liv Ullmann, Catherine Deneuve, Giuliana De Sio, Philippe Noiret, Bernard Blier. Screenplay, Leo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Suso Cecchi d'Amico, Tullio Pinelli, Jacqueline Lefevre, Monicelli; camera (color), Camillo Bazzoni; editor, Ruggero Mastroianni; music, Nicola Piovani; art director, Enrico Fiorentini. Reviewed at Capranica Cinema, Rome, March 1, 1986. Running time: 121 MINS.

Elena Liv Ullmann
Count Leonardo Philippe Noiret
Uncle Gughl Bernard Blier
Aunt Claudia Catherine Deneuve
Francesca Giuliana De Sio
Fosca Athina Cenci
Bambina Lucrezia Lante Della Rovere
Guido Nardoni Giuliano Gemma
Gym owner Stefania Sandrelli

Rome — Mario Monicelli has made one of his most appealing films in years, "Let's Hope It's A Girl," with an all-star cast of femme thespis that whets the appetite. In its gentle, refreshing, off-beat way, the picture delivers.

Neither comedy nor tragedy but more of a single-sex family saga, "Let's Hope" cleverly mixes its broad cast of characters in interweaving stories, whose point is that women can find alternative ways of living happily sans male companionship.

To film's credit, this simple thesis is demonstrated entertainingly with the help of a little black humor and a little forcing. It opened strong in Italy, thanks to its what-next script as much as the b.o. draw of its cast, led by an amusingly displaced Liv Ullmann as a strong-shouldered Countess-farmer.

As film begins, Philippe Noiret's Count Leonardo actually seems to be the main character. He drives up to a sprawling old Tuscan farmhouse, intent on persuading separated wife Elena (Ullmann) to finance his latest hare-brained scheme. A maid (fine comic thesp Athina Cenci) keeps the household running while mothering her daughter and that of Elena's sister, a famous movie star played by Catherine Deneuve at her most glamorous.

Elena's other girl, Bambina (Lucrezia Lante Della Rovere), is a grownup teen who wants to raise horses. Her eldest, Francesca (Giuliana De Sio) is paired off comically with a nerdish ethno-musicologist who records songs from the lips of dying peasants. In the middle of these introductions, which make up the first half of the picture, Leonardo drives his car off a cliff and disappears.

Monicelli realistically depicts the family breaking up in the wake of the accident. Later, though, the eldest daughters accuse Elena of being hard-hearted and uncaring about Papa, and Francesca abruptly leaves the house to get married. The film star takes her daughter to Rome to live with her, where a nasty lover provokes plate-smashing fights that terrify the child.

Elena decides to sell the farm, partly to repay Leonardo's lover Stefania Sandrelli, owner of a gym, the money she unwisely has lent him. Giuliano Gemma, overseer of the property, hesitates between marrying Elena (she refuses) and buying the farm (which he does). Forgetful Uncle Gughl (a show-stealing Bernard Blier) is packed off reluctantly to the old folks' home, and so on, until a turnaround conclusion shows the only logical thing for everybody to do is move in together at the farm. — *Yung*.