



MOVIE REVIEW

MORE ON 'WHEN DO WE EAT?'

'When Do We Eat?' Presents a Most Unorthodox Seder

By NEIL GENZLINGER
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Despite the broad humor that inhabits it, the land of Madcap is fairly small, and very difficult for a filmmaker to hit. In his sour little movie "When Do We Eat?," the director Salvador Litvak, like many before him, misses the target, landing instead in the adjacent territories of Tries Too Hard and Bad Taste.

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Ira Stuckman (Michael Lerner) is determined to drag his family through a Seder, and what a strenuously quirky family it is. One daughter (Shiri Appleby) is some kind of sex worker; another (Meredith Scott Lynn) brings her lesbian partner to the meal. One son (Max Greenfield) seems to have recently discovered Hasidism; another (Ben Feldman) confesses that he slipped Ira a tab of Ecstasy at the start of the gathering. Mom (Lesley Ann Warren) has a strange male friend (Mark Ivanir), and Grandpa (Jack Klugman) no doubt wishes he were back in "The Odd Couple." And let's not even get into the side plot that involves making a joke out of autism.

It's fine - healthy, even - to treat religious holidays with a little levity, but a certain respect is also mandatory. Mr. Litvak makes a late, halfhearted stab at that, but given the earlier goings-on (particularly a family discussion of whether the sex Mr. Greenfield's character just had with his cousin in the next room constituted incest), it's clear that this film has nothing but contempt for what some people hold sacred.

"When Do We Eat?" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian) for language and drug use.

When Do We Eat?

Opens today in the greater New York metropolitan area, Los Angeles and Florida.

Directed by Salvador Litvak; written by Nina Davidovich and Mr. Litvak; director of photography, M. David Mullen; edited by Richard Halsey; music by Mark Adler; production designer, Bernt Capra; produced by Steven J. Wolfe and Mr. Litvak; released by ThinkFilm. Running time: 93 minutes.

WITH: Michael Lerner (Ira Stuckman), Lesley Ann Warren (Peggy), Jack Klugman (Artur), Meredith Scott Lynn (Jennifer), Shiri Appleby (Nikki), Mili Avital (Vanessa), Ben Feldman (Zeke), Adam Lambert (Lionel), Max Greenfield (Ethan), Cynda Williams (Grace) and Mark Ivanir (Rafi).

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★★★★★ **Redemption Found at the Seder Table**, March 29, 2006

Reviewer: rabbifinley

There is an odd fact about Passover celebrations: any underlying tension in the family will likely come out at the Seder. Usually they are pushed aside. And occasionally, a family finds a moment of redemption. This is a movie about those moments. On one hand, it is a broad comedy farce. Every family may have a few of the edgy archetypes presented here, but not likely the menagerie of extremes seated around the Stuckman table. What we have here is a carefully designed composite - a Seder plate just waiting to be broken, so we can watch it be glued back together. Once we move beyond the effectively constructed comedy, the deeper levels of the characters emerge. The broad comedy sharpens. The writers know how to propel the characters into comedic collision, but don't leave them there. The truer talent is found in sustaining the humor while exploring the family's humanity. The movie unfolds to different levels, and finally to a mysterious and funny "finding the Afikoman" at the end. The straitlaced may be taken aback by the characters, initially overdrawn for comedic effect, but those folks have missed the point. Like a sweet onion, the movie peels away layers, each time revealing another delight. I've watched the movie many times. Each time I've discovered ever more nuanced layers of humor, humanity and healing. It is the only full length treatment of a Passover Seder ever filmed. It is funny. And it is a lot more. M Finley

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