

Movie Review: No Reservations

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No Reservations. "Life isn't always made to order"

Catherine Zeta-Jones, Aaron Eckhart, Abigail Breslin, Patricia Clarkson. Castle Rock Entertainment / Village Roadshow Pictures. Written by Carol Fuchs, based on the original screenplay entitled "Mostly Martha" by Sandra Nettelbeck. Directed by Scott Hicks. Opens 7/27/07

FILM SYNOPSIS: Master chef Kate Armstrong lives her life like she runs her kitchen at a trendy Manhattan eatery—with a no-nonsense intensity that both captivates and intimidates everyone around her. Kate's perfectionist nature is put to the test when she "inherits" her nine-year-old niece Zoe (her single mother is killed in a car crash), while contending with a brash new sous-chef who joins her staff. High-spirited and freewheeling, Nick Palmer couldn't be more different from Kate, yet the chemistry between them is undeniable. Rivalry becomes romance, but Kate will have to learn to express herself beyond the realm of her kitchen if she wants to connect with Zoe and find true happiness with Nick.

REVIEW: I call it an uneven production because it contains some positives, but with an equal amount of negative. The good: the actors. Ms. Zeta-Jones is lovely. Mr. Eckhart is suitably antic and little Abigail Breslin is touching. Also, no car chases and nothing blows up. (Did we just lose your husbands, ladies?)

I love movies containing the preparation of food, yet, most films avoid scenes with people eating, let alone the making of meals. That's a shame as that communal activity is both esthetic and therapeutic. Indeed, I suspect God gave the world music and food in order to unite us. (It's a shame that rather than doing battle, we can't sit down with our enemies and sup on spiced boiled shrimp or bowls of bouillabaisse.) Well, the action here revolves around a hoity toity restaurant, where we see exotic dishes being conjured while the relationships simmer. All that's good.

Alas, the negatives are just as annoying as Catherine and the food are sumptuous. First, the filmmaker gets a case of the cutes. It becomes too saccharine, especially when Aunt Kate and little Zoe have a pillow fight. Suddenly, my teeth began to ache. Added to this shortcoming, the film is also predictable. Oh, is it predictable. Midway through the film, I uttered the name of the restaurant the lead twosome would eventually own. And I was right.

There are some funny moments, it is diverting, and director Scott Hicks (Snow Falling on Cedars, Shine) mixes the ingredients of tragedy and comedy together sufficiently, but everything seems lightweight. Perhaps its depth is overwhelmed by its candied superficiality and predictability. Ultimately, the film is like tiramisu with too much coffee liqueur — just too sweet.

Video Alternatives

For better food films, try these video alternatives: Eat Drink Man Woman. This Chinese film takes as much care in developing the characters and their struggles as it does with its depiction of culinary delights. It is an insightful look into the importance of sex, religion, honor and, yes, food. And in the film, one of the sisters has become a born-again Christian. While she is a bit overzealous, she is never ridiculed. She is sincere in her beliefs and her family, though not yet taking that spiritual path, respects her choice. Caution, Eat, Drink, Man, Woman is rated R.

If you would rather not support an R-rated movie, allow me to suggest: Babette's Feast. This 1987 Oscar winner for Best Foreign Film centers around two devout Danish sisters who show kindness to a homeless woman. When she wins a lottery, the woman shares her good fortune in a most lavish manner. Based on a short story by Isak Dinesen, it is a beautiful tale of devotion and sacrifice, as well as a healing parable where quarreling friends and acquaintances are

brought together once they shed their pious austerity. The film urges us not to hide behind our religion, but to put it into action.

PG (a couple of crude sexual innuendos, but generally, the filmmaker avoids crudity; one profane use of God's name; we learn of a relative's death in a car crash, but do not see the tragedy; one implied sexual situation; some wine drinking with dinner).

Running Time: 90-some minutes. Intended Audience: Older teens and adults

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(Disclaimer: These are the views of the author and not necessarily the staff of JesusJournal. Given the synopsis and content, concerned parents and moviegoers can decide if the new releases are suitable for viewing.)