



Eat drink man woman

Director: Ang Lee
Country: China
Date: 1994

A review by Leonard Klady for Variety:

On the heels of the international success of “The Wedding Banquet,” Ang Lee has directed the ambitious and entertaining “Eat Drink Man Woman.” Again his focus is the family, and the universality of his themes should translate well commercially in both Eastern and Western markets.



New tale centers on Chu (Sihung Lung), a master chef who’s literally lost his sense of taste. The widower lives in Taipei with his three adult daughters — each of whom, consciously or otherwise, is just itching to leave the nest.

Jen (Kuei-Mei Yang), the eldest, teaches school and has skillfully learned to hide her emotions since a failed love affair during her university years. Kien (Chien-Lien Wu), a senior exec with the national airline, has her savings invested in an apartment in a new building complex. The youngest, Ning (Yu-Wen Wang), is still at school and works at a fast-food outlet. She has a slow-building relationship with her best friend’s boyfriend. Add to this Chu’s seemingly inevitable remarriage to Madame Liang (Ah-Leh Gua), the mother of the single mother next door, and tangle of relationships becomes extremely dense.

While the essential components of the film are serious, even grave, Lee’s touch is light and his approach anecdotal. Still, his leisurely laying-out of the emotional geography is cause for some initial impatience. With so many characters to identify, an anxiety builds that the plot strands have no core.

But as one of the daughters notes, “We communicate by eating.” In fact, the ritual of preparing food is a means to avoid interaction. That’s been the father’s modus operandi for years, and that irony is not overlooked in the fact that he’s lost this essential and pleasurable human experience.

The script is steeped in food metaphors and illusions. A cause of considerable strife between Kien and her father can be traced to his kicking her out of the kitchen and pushing her into a professional career. More obvious is Ning’s choice of a job in the type of eatery her father abhors.

Neither food nor love is finally enough, and it’s the former that prevails and allows the often crushing aspects of life to be unburdened. In one climactic scene the effect is refreshingly hilarious, and that insight into humanity is what makes “Eat Drink Man Woman” such a winning recipe.

One has to assume that commercial and critical kudos have been liberating for the filmmaker. The technical sheen and visual assurance of his latest film is a quantum leap from earlier credits. He also elicits deeper, more textured performances from his actors. The overall result is a cinematic feast that will have audiences returning for Lee’s next movie meal.

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