

Movie Review: 'Feast of Love'

by David_Elliott

The sustaining dish in "Feast of Love" is Morgan Freeman as savvy old Harry Stevenson, a professor on leave from his Oregon university (the other main dish is Portland, beautifully shot).

'FEAST OF LOVE' - Morgan Freeman plays Harry Stevenson and Alexa Davalos is Chloe in the romantic comedy 'Feast of Love.' CNS Photo courtesy of Peter Sorel. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Wise, attentive, always a bit too human to be pompous, Harry is a role dependent on Freeman's warmth, ease and sly gravity. This could have been a foxy corn dispenser, in the Lionel Barrymore or Wilford Brimley mode, but Freeman (despite some Hallmark card truisms) laces together Robert Benton's sensual comedy, scripted by Allison Burnett from Charles Baxter's novel.

In mourning for his dead son, along with his wife Esther (Jane Alexander), Harry seeks solace in the quickening amours around him. He becomes a sort of courtly Prospero and nudging Cupid, notably for the

hopeful, often hapless Brad (Greg Kinnear), a coffeehouse owner whose wife (Selma Blair) dumps him for a very forward lesbian.

Soon, Brad finds a glowing Realtor (Radha Mitchell), a sex siren who marries him to spite her married lover (Billy Burke). And there are young romancers, Chloe (Alexa Davalos) and equally pretty Oscar (Toby Hemingway), whose lives fall under Harry's wistful, kindly regard (as Chloe's dad, a brutal drunk, Fred Ward is the bogeyman).

Fertile and capering, this rondel dance of love fair and fouled invokes fate, luck, God and astrology. It has kids, a dog, a genial fortuneteller (Margo Martindale). Music tends to rely on well-honed cliches, and some love contortions are not quite freshened by an ace cast (Kinnear is like Jack Lemmon without the manic strain).

Even in rain, the story shines, and there are many glimmers of tasteful nudity (mostly young and female). Most of the elements peg in neat as parquet, for Benton has not lost the caring touches that so graced "The Late Show," "Kramer vs. Kramer," "Nobody's Fool" and "Places in the Heart."

Putting good, glad-to-serve actors in those heart places pretty well defines his talent. "Feast of Love" often purrs, thumping its tail on a sensual bed.

An MGM release. Director: Robert Benton. Writer: Allison Burnett. Cast: Morgan Freeman, Alexa Davalos, Greg Kinnear, Radha Mitchell, Selma Blair, Jane Alexander, Billy Burke. Running time: 1 hour, 42 minutes. Rated R. 3 stars.

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