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'Evening' boasts superb cast

Deborah Nicol
Desert Post Weekly
June 28, 2007

In our mind's eye, a fleeting moment of excitement can overshadow a lifetime of ordinary happiness. And it's in the ordinary moments that we forget how much we have accomplished and the fragility of our true bliss.

"You should create your beautiful moments in your life with your family... the good, the bad, the mediocre - it's yours," Lajos Koltai, director of the new film "Evening," explained in a recent phone interview.

Koltai once again stands next to the camera rather than behind it. As cinematographer of award-winning films (Malena, Mephisto), he worked so closely with directors that this transition was natural. Involved in every aspect of the film, he made certain that this cast is no less than stellar.

Vanessa Redgrave is excellent as Ann, an elderly woman grasping at missed opportunities and slipping memories. Lying in her death bed, she is troubled by a turning point lost to the past. In younger memories, Ann is portrayed as an optimistic bohemian with a lovely (undubbed) singing voice by Claire Danes. The world before her, she dives into a passionate affair during her best friend's wedding.

Patrick Wilson represents the affair's tempting bit of perfection. His character, Harris, is attractive to all, but the path of broken hearts behind him is a result of unrealistic expectations by the lovelorn. Koltai describes him as a "ready person," already set in his path, no longer searching for answers.

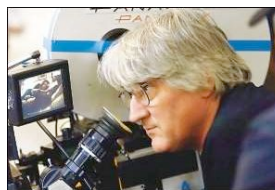
The wedding party is another story. Tight-lipped bride Lila, played on the verge of breakdown by Mamie Gummer, frantically lunges at her last chance for an ideal life before settling into rigid denial. Lila's older self is played by Gummer's mother, Meryl Streep, and each does an exceptional job of mirroring the other.

Hugh Dancy is charismatic as Buddy, Lila's adoring but misguided brother. A struggling writer yearning for the perfect beginning to his own story, his affections are smothering. Unlike Harris, Koltai describes Buddy as "full of question marks."

He begs for love from Ann, Lila and Harris in a desperate quest for safety and assurance.

The consequences of the emotional havoc of that wedding weekend are reflected in Ann's grown daughters. Fickle Nina (Toni Collette) feels any unresolved dream to be a sign of failure. Steadfast Constance seems all too sensible by comparison but recognizes when happy moments are infused into the unremarkable. Natasha Richardson plays upon her relationship with mother Redgrave, and Koltai created a new scene specifically to draw out this connection.

It is within these connections that the story draws strength. As Ann reflects on the weekend where she gained love just as quickly as she lost it, she is forced to acknowledge that though life has been unpredictable, the familial results are most important. Koltai does a lovely job of refocusing a tale of romance into a tale of the results of romance.



Focus Features

Director Lajos Koltai on the set of "Evening."

'EVENING'

Rated: PG-13 for some thematic elements, sexual material, a brief accident scene and language.

Time: 1 hour, 57 minutes
Cast: Vanessa Redgrave, Meryl Streep, Glenn Close, Toni Collette, Natasha Richardson
Director: Lajos Koltai
Showing: Opens Friday.

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