

When Do We Eat? **GRADE B**

R for drug use, language and some sexual content

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By [NANCY CHURNIN](#) / The Dallas Morning News

A Norman Rockwell Seder, this isn't. Despite the best attempts from Mom to make it so.



When Do We Eat? echoes the question inevitably asked at the lengthy Passover service in which Jews remember and give thanks for having been delivered from slavery to freedom.

The film about the Stuckman family starts with a jolt as Mom (Lesley Ann Warren) calls just as teen son Zeke (Ben Feldman) is in the midst of a drug deal. Mom wants him to bring home a box of matzo.

He refuses, and we get introduced to other family members who get asked (and can't be bothered to bring it either): daughters and half-sisters Nikki (Shiri Appleby), who works as a sexual surrogate; and Jennifer (Meredith Scott Lynn), who brings home her black partner, Grace (Cynda Williams). Grace is the one who manages to come through with the

A talented ensemble, including Max Greenfield, shares the Passover table in "When Do We Eat?"

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matzo.

Then there's Ethan (Max Greenfield), the son who gave up his business career to devote himself full time to religious observance; Lionel (Adam Lamberg), who is autistic; and Grandpa (Jack Klugman), who never unpacks the suitcase he brings to his only son's house.

They all have issues with the clan's hot-tempered dad, Ira (Michael Lerner), who makes Christmas tree ornaments for a living and broke the Seder plate last year in a fit with Ethan.

But stick with the joke-peppered script, written by the married team of Nina Davidovich and director Salvador Litvak, and you'll glimpse something more is afoot. The filmmakers care about this family and what the warring factions discover about themselves and one another during this long day's journey into Seder.

And by the time you wade through the bumpiest part, parallels begin to emerge between the Stuckmans struggling to become a family and the newly freed Jews of the Passover story stumbling on their way to

becoming a people.

The plot device that helped this earn an R rating (along with some profanity and sexual situations) is Zeke's decision to slip Ira a tablet of Ecstasy in his antacid drink. When Ira clutches his chest afterward, Zeke confesses what he's done and the rest of the family tells Ira what to expect from the drug.

Mr. Lerner, a skilled 30-year veteran of feature films, segues seamlessly from unlikable to tug-your-heart sympathetic as he starts to see prophets and emanations of light and begins to sense what he must do to lead his family.

During the plot's twists and turns, family members rage and confront, torment and comfort each other as secrets unravel. An appealing ensemble cast helps. As the mother, Ms. Warren has come a long way from her *Cinderella* television debut. Mr. Klugman, so long associated with comic roles, finds the pain of the Holocaust survivor under the anger and mistrust. Mili Avital's Vanessa, who plays a family cousin, offers the allure that tempts Ethan from his convictions. And Ms. Williams' Grace becomes a spirited and positive force that pushes the family along on unexpected paths toward forgiveness.

Despite all the characters' considerable flaws, the tale ends on an up note thanks to the humor and hints that Ira's transformation will last beyond the evening.

Is it a little too inside for the non-Jewish crowd? Maybe. Too offensive for the Jewish ones? Perhaps. But this in-your-face ride from a talented team is worth a look.

More information

[Movie Web site](#)

[Movie trailer](#)

Starring Michael Lerner, Jack Klugman, Lesley Ann Warren, Ben Feldman, Mili Avital, Cynda Williams, Max Greenfield and Adam Lamberg.

Directed by Salvador Litvak.

In limited release / 93 minutes

Online at: <http://www.kvue.com/sharedcontent/movies/arthouse/042806ccdrMOVIESwhendoweeat.7dd1a291.html>