



The Star-Ledger

Stoned soul Seder

Dysfunctional family's Passover story has much to entertain and offend

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When Do We Eat?

(R) ThinkFilm (93 mins.) Directed by Salvador Litvak. Stars Michael Lerner, Lesley Ann Warren. Opens Friday at theaters in New York and New Jersey.

Stars: 2 1/2

Why is this night different from all other nights?

For the dysfunctional Stuckman family, it's a big night because they've set aside their differences to gather for their first Passover Seder in years. The perfect meal descends into utter chaos after one of the hosts sips a beverage spiked with Ecstasy and begins hallucinating.

A holiday comedy, "When Do We Eat?" serves up sex, drugs and matzoh, along with an array of politically incorrect jokes. Characters make wisecracks about the Holocaust, incest, autism, prostitution and other subjects unsuitable for Seder conversation.

The movie should amuse some and irritate others. It's geared towards those with a high threshold for neurotic humor.

Debut director Salvador Litvak co-wrote the story with his wife, Nina Davidovich. Although the picture is described as autobiographical in the press notes, many of the characters are familiar archetypes. Seated at the table are dour lesbians, macho handymen, stoner teenagers and other clichés.

Overseeing the festivities, Ira Stuckman (Michael Lerner) starts the night promising the "fastest Seder on earth." He plans to breeze through the book of prayers so the feasting can commence. His wife, Peggy (Lesley Ann Warren), doesn't want to rush things, however, hoping to impress their religious son (Max Greenfield), who's transformed himself from yuppie to Hassid -- yet doesn't understand Hebrew.

Tending to every detail, Peggy hires a hunky Israeli contractor (Mark Ivanir) to build a tent for the backyard and prepares an entrée of authentic Passover lamb. "Smells like impaled baby sheep," deadpans eldest daughter (Meredith Scott Lynn), who comes to dinner with her lesbian girlfriend (Cynda Williams).

It's a tough crowd all around. Ira is beleaguered with squabbling kids, a perfectionist wife and his elderly father (Jack Klugman), a Holocaust survivor who can't stop talking about Nazis and concentration camps.

Ira's hippie son, Zeke (Ben Feldman), wants his dad to lighten up, so he spikes his antacid with Ecstasy. Soon enough, Ira is seeing strange desert visions and hearing cantors singing in his head. He starts to think he is Moses and his dinner guests are pilgrims. It's a crazy, cathartic meal that ultimately has a healing influence on the family.

"When Do We Eat?" is as imperfect as the Stuckmans' Seder, yet it has some decent punchlines, a strong

cast and a good heart. The filmmakers get points for imagination, combining Jewish humor and psychedelic imagery.

Rating note: The film contains sexual content, strong language, adult themes and drug use.

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