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A fractious family forges new bonds during a Seder

By Phoebe Flowers
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★★★★☆ *When Do We Eat?* takes place before, during and after a Passover Seder. But you don't have to be Jewish to savor this light and enjoyable comedy. If you're an exasperated dad, a frustrated mom, a rebellious teenager -- or a member of any family that doesn't get along perfectly (i.e., any family) -- *When Do We Eat?* will probably have some resonance for you.

Salvador Litvak's debut film begins with sullen Zeke (Ben Feldman) smoking a joint with his friend and dealer, dreading the holiday gathering later in the day. On a whim, he buys a tab of Ecstasy to get through the Seder with his squabbling family.

Dad Ira (Michael Lerner), who somewhat ironically is a Christmas-decoration tycoon, brags about running "the world's fastest Seder." But it's difficult to believe any meeting among these variously related people could go smoothly or efficiently.

Ira's wife, Peggy (Lesley Ann Warren), has gone to an enormous amount of trouble to entice their ne'er-do-well son, Ethan (Max Greenfield, TV's *Veronica Mars*), to attend the Seder. Ethan has dealt with his bankruptcy by becoming Hasidic, despite the fact that he's in love with his cousin Vanessa (Mili Avital). Daughter Nikki (Shiri Appleby) makes a living as a uniquely hands-on sex therapist. Ira's daughter from his first marriage, Jennifer (the fantastic Meredith Scott Lynn), is a lesbian with an ax to grind. And floating around in the background are Ira's dad, played by the legendary Jack Klugman, and his youngest son, autistic Lionel (Adam Lamberg).

As all these combative elements converge, director and co-writer Litvak does a remarkable job of keeping the story focused and funny. In tone, *When Do We Eat?* is somewhat reminiscent of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* -- a solid comedy that didn't cost anything near a fortune. Engaging performances and daring subject matter cement it as a small film that makes a considerably bigger impression.

A version of this review was published during the 2005 Palm Beach International Film Festival. Phoebe Flowers can be reached at pflowers@sun-sentinel.com.

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