

“Date Night” and “Mid-August Lunch”

A review by Tom Sims

A lot can happen in one night. Take last night for example. After sitting through the movie “Date Night,” I had to take an antidote which came by way of a great Italian film, “Mid-August Lunch.” The majority of storytelling for both films takes place over the course of one night—which could be a type of category if you want to include such films as George Lucas’ “American Graffiti” (1973), Martin Scorsese’s “After Hours” (1985), Bruce Willis in “Die Hard” (1988), and Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy in “Before Sunrise” (1995).

In Date Night, Steve Carrell and Tina Fey play a suburban New Jersey couple who appear to be content if not a little bored with their lives. They get in the middle of a mess when they pretend to be a couple just to get their missed reservation at an upscale restaurant. Tina Fey is absolutely one of the most adorable comedienne working today, and I can tolerate Steve Carrell in most cases (including a good performance in this movie). But no matter how good they are, they could not save this movie.

This movie is filled with clichés both in the written word and in action sequences like the overused “gunslingin’ standoff!” Yes there were laughs throughout the film, but laughs need to be supported with sound storytelling and witty dialogue throughout. If you’re really looking for a “date night” movie, go see “City Island” instead (reviewed a few weeks ago right here in this column).

“Mid-August Lunch” is a film set in Rome and tells the story of a middle-aged man living and caring for his elderly mother. Behind on his rent, he makes a deal with the Condo bookkeeper to care for his mother overnight in exchange for “adjusting the books” on the condo fees. When the deal goes down, turns out his bookkeeper also has an elderly aunt that surprisingly is part of the mix. Not surprisingly, our lead character begins to have a little angina, and his doctor comes to check him out. How can he repay the doctor? Just so happens he also has an elderly mother that he needs to have watched overnight—the same night.

This film was produced on a low budget with non-professional actors, and it has all the charm and wit that “Date Night” should have had. It’s a close, personal film with intimate direction and a pace in keeping with its Italian heritage. Take your time, enjoy the story as these elderly women act like sorority school girls reading palms and enjoying food and drink forbidden in their everyday lives. Two films—one beautiful, one not-so-hot—but all-in-all not that bad for one night!