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At the movies



Isabelle Huppert and Miou Miou play two women whose friendship grows stronger than their marriages.

Life at heart of friendship

"Entre Nous," ("Between Us") Diane Kurys' 1983 Oscar nominated film, is an affecting and affectionate study of the impenetrable bond of friendship between two women.

French actresses Miou Miou and Isabelle Huppert portray Madeleine and Lena, two housewives who meet purely by circumstance in 1952 at their children's school's Christmas recital. Almost immediately they become best friends, and together they share their dramatic World War II experiences: Madeleine, an artist, had lost her husband during the war in a freak accident, and Lena had escaped from a concentration camp through the efforts of a kind Jewish soldier who later became her husband.

Radically different women, they have radically different husbands. Personally my sympathies lie with Michel (Guy Marchand), the man who rescued Lena from the camp and helped her escape to Italy. The owner of a small garage, Michel is a kind, doting father who loves to roughhouse with his daughters. Still, he has a narrow view of women in society.

Madeleine's husband is Costa (Jean-Pierre Bacri), an aspiring actor who wheels and deals for finances in the interim between jobs. While his problems don't lie with women in society and the family, Costa isn't perfect:

He cheats everyone he deals with. He's a seedy chap, but Madeleine seems to really love him — until he cheats her too.

Set against these sticky family situations is the challenge to the two women of turning 30 and trying to maintain a level of independence and individualism — in the '50s.

Writer-director Kurys keeps this tale propelled forward without missing out on the drama of the story. She lets the relationship carry the film: focusing on the shared moments of happiness, sorrow, elation and decision following the family events each experiences singly.

Miou Miou, a strikingly beautiful actress, brings to Madeleine the strength and conviction she represents, both as an artist and an independent woman. The stronger of the two friends, Madeleine is the first to make decisions which Lena shies away from; Madeleine seems to push Lena into taking steps that lead to the unknown, but at the same time she injects the concern that gives those pushes the air of rightness.

Huppert portrays Lena as one who is slowly, carefully feeling her way into Madeleine's brave new world of independence. Lena has the genuine caution of one who is timid about approaching the unknown. Huppert skillfully documents the

growth of self confidence and inner strength in one woman as she takes control of her life.

Kurys doesn't make Costa and Michel out to be total villains, but she's not overly sympathetic either. Michel is indeed fearful about his faltering marriage, and he begins to act almost paranoid as his wife's relationship with Madeleine progresses; he finally accuses her of lesbianism. The validity of his claim is questionable; the film is intentionally ambiguous about that aspect of the relationship.

On the other hand Costa is much more understanding than he first appears. He may treat business with less than honorable scruples, but he gives Madeleine the freedom she requests and thrives on.

However visible the men are in the film, the heart of the story lies in the relationship between the two women. Their relationship is strong and unique. It is explored with honesty and depth.

"Entre Nous" ends on a sober, reflective note that rings with the pain of truth. The choice could not have been made, however, without the growth and support provided by the unique friendship. The life Madeleine and Lena give each other is a gift that touches them both to the soul. The film works in much the same way.

Sean Axmaker

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