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**Valley River Center**

# 'Jessica Stein' gives viewers kiss-off of predictable story

Modern romantic comedy 'Kissing Jessica Stein' has audiences expecting something 'fresh' and 'original'



## 'Kissing Jessica Stein'

★★★★☆

By Ryan Bornheimer  
for the Emerald

"Kissing Jessica Stein" comes to Eugene after a successful run in New York and Los Angeles. Audiences seem to have responded to what could be described as an unconventional romantic comedy. On the surface, I guess it is. But if the movie is as "fresh" and "original" as some reviewers have said, why is it so predictable?

Jessica (Jennifer Westfeldt) is sick of the dating scene. The latest string of suitors are either cheap, dim-witted or just plain oblivious. She's nearly given up hope when she spots an ad in the personals quoting her favorite poet. The only thing is, the ad was placed by a woman. Regardless, Jessica sets up a date with the woman, Helen Cooper (Heather Juergensen), a funky chick who runs an art gallery. After a hefty bit of coaxing, Jessica finally warms up to the idea of a same-sex relation-

ship, even if she's not in any hurry to tell her family or friends about it.

Helen, on the other hand, has more men than she knows what to do with. When we first meet her, she's juggling no fewer than three at once. Out of bedroom boredom, she places the ad in hopes of broadening her sexual repertoire.

"It's the one thing I've never done," she tells her friends.

But we soon learn that while Helen thinks what she craves is sexual release, what she really wants is intimacy. Jessica provides the tenderness that the men in Helen's life can't. Meanwhile Jessica, who's spent her entire adult life talking herself out of things, learns to cut loose and go with the flow.

The trouble is, we've seen Jessica in countless romantic comedies: She's 30-something; she's neurotic; everyone around her is either married or pregnant; her overbearing mother (Jovah Feldshuh) is intent on fixing her up with every single Jewish man she runs across; and of course, the clock is ticking.

But it isn't so much the clichés that undermine "Stein." The failure lies in the way the movie's conclusion is so telegraphed and neat. It never reaches beyond the desire to satisfy audiences appeased by most Julia Roberts vehicles. Within a half-hour, it isn't difficult to see where things are headed. And what happens along the way just isn't interesting enough to make up for its predictability.

That isn't to say the movie isn't fun at times. Director Charles Herman-Wurmfeld shows a steady hand and a knack for staging the action of the script written by Juergensen and Westfeldt.

"Stein" is a light-hearted take on a fairly complicated scenario. Yet there is a deceptively touching moment when Jessica's mother realizes the true nature of her daughter's relationship with Helen and tenderly offers support. Feldshuh nails the scene honestly and truthfully without tripping up the movie's farcical tone.

The movie seems to have arrived right on time. It's relevant to an increasingly complicated singles scene — the logical evolution of the modern romantic comedy. And it is better than like-minded attempts such as "Chasing Amy" and "Threesome." But it doesn't push the envelope. I'm not talking about the issues of sexuality. The movie's not even about sex. It's about friendship and intimacy. Because the movie starts off somewhat promisingly, its harmless but inadequate conclusion is that much more disappointing. In the end, "Stein" can't escape the trappings of the well-oiled Hollywood formulas.

"Kissing Jessica Stein" is now playing at the Bijou Art Cinemas.

Ryan Bornheimer is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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## Clinton

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Brendan Relaford, buyer for the McDonald Theatre, has also seen the group about 20 times and has been a fan of the group for as long as he can remember. He said that George Clinton shows are amazing because of the non-stop barrage of funk.

"It's one of the best you can see," Relaford said. "There's a guy on stage in a diaper. Big guys dress as little girls. They get wacky."

UO Cultural Forum National Music Coordinator Alexis Stevens has wanted to bring George Clinton to Eugene since she was hired last year.

"He's the master of funk, you know," she said.

Stevens recently saw Lucinda Williams at the McDonald Theatre and is excited to see George Clinton in that venue.

"It will be a really fun show," she said.

Rossoff said that the venue can seat anywhere from 800 to 1,200 people when the seats are taken out.

"At George Clinton, there will be a lot of standing room," Rossoff said. "We keep working on the room and the sound, and it keeps getting better."

Rossoff said that there are several definitions of funk. It can be a funky smell or a funky attitude.

"He (George) likes to think of it as an attitude, a style. Being funky and free, free and funky," Rossoff said.

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### Today's crossword solution


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LINE	ARGUS	IDLE
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PREYON	SETUPS	
IAN	COSA	FADED
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