

Cooking For Two

Savoring some delicious moments

JULIE & JULIA: Written and directed by Nora Ephron. Based on the books *Julie and Julia* by Julie Powell and *My Life in France* by Julia Child and Alex Prud'homme. Starring Meryl Streep, Amy Adams, Stanley Tucci and Chris Messina. Columbia Pictures, 2009. PG-13. 124 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

I cannot count the superlatives used to describe Meryl Streep's performance as Julia Child in Nora Ephron's *Julie & Julia* — and I've been trying to avoid reading the reviews. Streep, cleverly (if sometimes obviously) made to tower like the 6'2" Julia, tips toward people as if she smells something she likes on them; she's breathless, and her voice is unmistakable. If you don't come to the film with a great love for Child, it may take a few minutes to adjust, to start seeing Julia Child rather than Meryl Streep turning in another major performance. When you do, though, *Julie & Julia* snaps into place: There she is, the Julia who hasn't found her place in culinary history yet. Streep is airborne, a bumbling yet appealing creature in flight. When the film shifts to the story of Julie Powell (Amy Adams), it settles back down to earth, finding a lovely symmetry in the stories of two women who find themselves, and their passions, in the kitchen.



Meryl Streep as Julia Child

In 2002 New York, Julie has just moved into a Queens walkup with her husband, Eric (Chris Messina). Her job is less than fulfilling, and most of her friends are terrible. In 1948 France — a place gilded and so warmly lit it hardly looks real — Julia and her husband, Paul (Stanley Tucci), have just arrived. Julia loves everything, charms everyone and really doesn't know what to do with herself. What does she like to do? Eat, which, as they note over one of many delectable dinners, she and Paul are very good at. What's Julie good at? She's not sure. She wrote half of a novel once. Over a simple dinner — and in a slightly awkward conversation — she arrives at the notion of writing a blog as she cooks her way through Julia's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. One year; 524 recipes. You do the math.

Adams has the fairly thankless role, the contemporary 30ish woman who doesn't know what she wants in life; worse, she finds herself through blogging, a notion sure to make plenty of eyes roll. She's no Julia Child, sure, but no one can be. And were *Julie & Julia* simply about the towering, inimitable Child, the film would lose part of its strength: Julia, in Nora Ephron's script, is very nearly the perfect creature Julie imagines her to be, and thus Julie, with her meltdowns and small but believable fights with her husband, brings in the human-sized part of the story. (Though to be fair, the cinematic Julie is also less dramatic, and less prone to enjoying her vodka gimlets, than the one in the book.)

Even with the difference in scale — Julia larger than life, living well wherever Paul is sent by his government job; Julie small and ordinary and concerned with the number of comments on her blog — Ephron lines up

their paths just so. Child's gorgeous French apartment and Powell's tiny Queens kitchen turn out to be the same place: where change starts. Both lives are an argument against the obnoxious notion that one must know who and what one wants to be by the ripe old age of 25. And both relationships are proof that there can be romance and sex and sweetness between married couples, even over the age of 40.

In fact, *Julie & Julia* is full of things often thought to be near-impossible in Hollywood movies: It's a film about women, as A.O. Scott pointed out in *The New York Times*, that's not about "the desperate pursuit of men." Instead, it's about what women need outside of and beyond relationships, and how hard it can be to find those things, even if it seems you've got everything else. It has couples where the women are taller and — shock! — the partners appear to be fairly close in age. The most emotional moments pass quietly but still heartbreakingly. Failure is met with frustration but little high drama. Cheese and butter are praised, and only the most grating characters deny themselves the pleasure of enjoying a good meal. It needn't be a perfect meal — or a perfect film — to be worth savoring. **EW**

movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING:

ArchaeologyFest Film Series: Best of 2009: Selections from the festival, which took place earlier this year, play over two weekends. 7:30 pm Aug. 14, 15, 21 & 22, DIVA. \$6. See full schedule at divacenter.org

Bandslam: *High School Musical*'s Vanessa Hudgens costars in this story of rival high school bands hoping to face off at a battle of the bands. PG. 111 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Chéri: Michelle Pfeiffer leads the cast of Stephen Frears' adaptation of the Colette story about an aging French courtesan and the much younger man (Rupert Friend) she loves. Kathy Bates co-stars. R. Bijou. **See review this issue.**

Departures: An Oscar nominee for Best Foreign Language Film, Yojiro Takita's film follows a cellist who loses his job, moves back to his hometown and finds himself working preparing bodies for funerals — a job everyone else hates, but he takes quite seriously. "Uncommonly absorbing," said Roger Ebert. Not rated. Bijou.

District 9: Producer Peter Jackson gets top billing, but this sci-fi film about aliens taking refuge in South Africa is actually the feature-film debut of director Neill Blomkamp. The buzz is beyond good; Blomkamp is already being dubbed one to watch. R. 112 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Goods, The: Live Hard, Sell Hard: The underrated Jeremy Piven stars in this flick about ... honestly, I can't really tell what it's about. But Piven's character finds love while trying to save a car dealership from bankruptcy. Whatever. It's Jeremy Piven. He's funny. R. 90 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

I Love You, Man: Some people are calling this one a dick flick: Paul Rudd proposes to his girlfriend (Rashida Jones), but then desperately needs to find a male best friend to be his best man. So he goes on a bunch of "man-dates." With Andy Samberg and the delightful Jason Segel. R. David Minor Theater. ★★☆☆☆ (3/26)

Ponyo: This loose adaptation of "The Little Mermaid," in which an eager goldfish dreams of becoming human, is directed by Hayao Miyazaki (*Spirited Away*). Honestly, you shouldn't need to know anything else. OK, the voice actors include Cate Blanchett, Liam Neeson, Matt Damon, Noah Cyrus and Frankie Jonas, and apparently those last two are just fine. Just go, already! G. 100 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Time Traveler's Wife, The: Rachel McAdams and Eric Bana star in this adaptation of Audrey Niffenegger's bestselling book about a man cursed with a genetic anomaly that sends him skipping, uncontrollably, through time — and the woman who loves him despite that. PG13. 107 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Triplets of Belleville, The: Sylvain Chomet's animated tale features the writer-director's whimsical, skewed architecture looming over the bizarre figures, who populate his strange and wonderful story. A don't-miss gem from 2003, the film's Academy Award noms include Best Animated Film and original song. PG-13. David Minor Theater.

URFest: Nationally touring festival of documentary films about urban renewal is intended to "start community dialogues about urban revitalization." Probably we all ought to go, then. 7 pm Thursday, Aug. 20, DIVA. Donations.

Visioneers: Actor Zach Galifianakis' new film, a dystopian story about a future in which feelings are tightly controlled, is being released online (www.visioneersthemovie.com) and shown at screenings all over the place. (The night before this one, Wandering Goat also hosts a Galifianakis lookalike contest. No joke.) 9 pm Saturday, Aug. 15, Wandering Goat. 21+. Donations. **See review this issue.**

Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com

DIFFERENT BY CHOICE.
DISCOVER THE TASTE OF THE WORLD'S BEST SELLING GERMAN BEER.

According to German purity law, you only get four ingredients to brew beer—barley, hops, yeast and water. Sounds limiting, but the right ingredients in the right hands gets you something special like the robust flavor of Beck's.

A local favorite since 1873 and now Germany's #1 export beer. Danke.

ALWAYS ENJOY RESPONSIBLY™

©2008 Import Brands Alliance, Importers of Beck's® Beer, St. Louis, MO