

Guess-Who's Coming to Dinner: "The Kids Are All Right" and "Dinner for Schmucks"

Written by Mike Schulz

Sunday, 01 August 2010 12:25

- [Buy Apple Final Cut Pro X MAC \(en\)](#)
- [Buy Cheap Roxio Copy & Convert 3](#)
- [Discount - Pixarra TwistedBrush Pro Studio 15](#)
- [239.95\\$ Autodesk AutoCAD 2010 cheap oem](#)
- [Discount - Lynda.com - Photoshop CS4 Essential Training](#)
- [Buy Flying Meat Acorn 2 MAC \(en\)](#)
- [Download Lynda.com - Wedding Photography for Everyone: Bridal Portraits](#)
- [19.95\\$ 1Click DVD Copy 5 cheap oem](#)
- [399.95\\$ Siemens Solid Edge ST6 \(64-bit\) cheap oem](#)
- [Buy Cheap Autodesk AutoCAD Electrical 2010 \(32 bit\)](#)
- [Buy OEM Lynda.com - InDesign CS6 New Features](#)



THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT

In general terms, explaining what director Lisa Cholodenko's *The Kids Are All Right* is "about" is a pretty easy task: 18-year-old Joni (Mia Wasikowska) and 15-year-old Laser (Josh Hutcherson) - the children of a contented and devoted lesbian couple (Annette Bening's Nic and Julianne Moore's Jules) - arrange a first meeting with their shared sperm-donor father (Mark Ruffalo's Paul), and through several

more

meetings, watch as his casually disruptive presence gradually, irrevocably alters their family dynamic. Yet while this is an accurate, if simplified, plot synopsis, it doesn't come remotely close to explaining what this buoyant, original, altogether extraordinary dramatic comedy is *actually* about.

It's about the kids' faces during their introductory lunch with Paul: Joni's wide-eyed, unfettered happiness revealing that she's finally found the Cool Dad she didn't even know she was looking for; Laser's reserved fascination suggesting an adolescent desperate to connect yet terrified of connecting too quickly. It's about Paul's tentative yet nearly instantaneous rapport with these kids, and the way he says goodbye after that lunch, giving Joni a hug and Laser a handshake followed by an awkward, trying-to-be-fatherly squeeze on the shoulder. (If the casting of Mark Ruffalo as this sweet, scruffy, laid-back, sometimes dangerously irresponsible organic farmer seems a little too obvious, it's also for good reason: Were the role not played by Ruffalo, you'd spend the whole movie wondering *why* it wasn't.)

Guess-Who's Coming to Dinner: "The Kids Are All Right" and "Dinner for Schmucks"

Written by Mike Schulz

Sunday, 01 August 2010 12:25

It's about the way that Nic, at the first dinner they're hosting for Paul, watches Jules as she rambles on about her latest business venture, her wary squint signifying, "Please don't embarrass us in front of the sperm donor." It's about Jules' subtly mortified realization that Nic, trying too hard to be pleasant with Paul, is just barely masking her utter contempt. It's about the women's continual, comically oblivious reliance on therapeutic shorthand, peppering their conversations with "I feel like there's some subtext here" and "Maybe it hasn't risen to the point of consciousness for you yet" and "I know I haven't been my highest self lately." (Written by Cholodenko and Stuart Blumberg, *Kids'* smart, biting, literate script lightly satirizes its characters without ever once stooping to mockery.)

It's about Joni's anxious, rebellious uncertainty as she drunkenly approaches a high-school crush. It's about Laser's heartbroken anger after deciding that his best friend is, in truth, a colossal prick. It's about Jules' hilarious attempt at explaining to Laser why lesbians would watch man-on-man porn. ("Wouldn't you rather watch naked girls?" "You would *think*.") It's about Paul's reflexive, I-can't-believe-I-just-*did*

-that laughter every time he does something he shouldn't - which is often. It's about Nic's shocked, paralyzing discovery of a betrayal, the jovial discussion around her slowly shifting into a barely audible rumble.

The Kids Are All Right is, in short, about dozens upon dozens of brilliantly textured and memorable details. The tenuous yet indescribably forceful bond between parents and children, the loving struggle that constitutes daily existence between long-term partners, the self-inflicted wounds that come with trying, and failing, to be your "highest self" - these are the subjects that Cholodenko, Blumberg, and the film's overwhelmingly fine ensemble so adroitly tackle in this stunningly big-hearted and truthful work. Like life, *The Kids Are All Right* is really funny, and really sad, and something you really don't want to be over, and for all of its aforementioned, beautifully realized moments and themes, there's one other thing that the movie is about: perfect.



DINNER FOR SCHMUCKS

Guess-Who's Coming to Dinner: "The Kids Are All Right" and "Dinner for Schmucks"

Written by Mike Schulz

Sunday, 01 August 2010 12:25

Maybe it's just my natural aversion to French farce, but for all of the frequent cackling at my screening of *Dinner for Schmucks* - adapted from Francis Veber's French-language smash *The Dinner Game* -

I found it damned near impossible to join in. To be sure, director Jay Roach's leads at least offer some pleasure. Playing a pathologically clueless IRS agent with a side interest in (and astonishing gift for) taxidermy, Steve Carell, even after 100-plus episodes of

The Office

, still finds ways to surprise you into giggling with his flawless approximation of a well-meaning nitwit. And as the nice guy roped into bringing this wiener to a career-making soirée, Paul Rudd pulls off straight-man apoplexy with aplomb, and has a hysterical bit in which he attempts to walk after dislocating his back. Yet I found

Dinner for Schmucks

itself exhaustingly labored and senseless - it's impossible to believe that Rudd's seemingly sane, gallery-curator girlfriend (Stephanie Szostak) would be in thrall to the specious "talents" of Jemaine Clement's preening-egomaniac artiste - and initially amusing sequences drag on for such an achingly long time that I, for one, began to resent them; the usually great Zach Galifianakis, in particular, is forced to wear out his welcome. Then, too, the movie's closeups are

oppressively

close, and the slapstick is poorly staged, and Ron Livingston and Larry Wilmore and ventriloquist comic Jeff Dunham are badly wasted, and Lucy Punch delivers a hideously unappealing performance, and the inevitable maudlin sentiment doesn't jibe with the early, laugh-at-the-dweeb meanness, and Okay, maybe it's not

just

my natural aversion to French farce.