

Domestic drama: life in a nutshell

Hannah and her Sisters
Orion Pictures
Westmount Cineplex Odeon

review by Dean Bennett

In his latest film, *Hannah and her Sisters*, writer-director-actor Woody Allen is again wrestling with the age-old question of the seeming senselessness of our existence. But unlike previous films, he now seems to be coming to terms with it.

Hannah is the story of Hannah, an affluent New York City housewife and career woman (played by Mia Farrow), and the people in her life - namely her husband, ex-husband, and two sisters. The plot revolves around the people in Hannah's life trying to fill spiritual voids.

Hannah's husband Elliot (Michael Caine) feels there is a spiritual hole in his life that can only be plugged by a clandestine love affair with Hannah's sister, Lee (Barbara Hershey). Lee, in turn, feels suffocated in her relationship with the quasi-geriatric Frederick (Mac Von Sydow) and agrees to the affair. Hannah's other sister, Holly (Dianne West), needs to do something productive. She's a flop as an actress and tries to replace it with a catering company and later some playwrighting.

If there is one trait all these characters have in common it is their reliance on Hannah. Hannah financially subsidizes Holly's catering and playwrighting adventures and she gives spiritual comfort to all. Elliot later admits that she brought order to his otherwise chaotic life. All three, however, resent her because she is so perfect. They resent her for being a perfect cook, being an incredible actress, and for having a calm, quietly assured personality. They resent her and hurt her. Elliot and Lee have the affair and Holly goads Hannah whenever Hannah disagrees with her on any point concerning her career. Tension mounts and culminates in an argument between Hannah and Elliot. Hannah protests that she, too, has needs and Elliot retorts, "Well I can't see them and neither can Lee or Holly."

Interspersed with these affairs is the story of Mickey Sachs (Allen). Mickey, Hannah's ex-husband, is a harried television producer who thinks he might have a brain tumor. When the medical tests came back negative,

Mickey is alternately elated and depressed. He's elated because he isn't going to die, but he's disillusioned about a world that can grant and rescind life so quickly and so arbitrarily. He quits his job and goes out in search of the meaning of life. He tries philosophy, Catholicism, Hare Krishna, and even contemplates suicide until he finds contentment at a Marx Brothers movie. At the movie he sees the screen characters enjoying themselves and he thinks life can't be all bad. "So what if it is true and you do only go around once?" he asks himself. "Why reach for answers you'll never get? A maybe is a slim reed to hold onto, but it's all we've got."

For the rest of the characters, coming to terms with their relationship to Hannah gives their lives purpose because, on one level, Hannah personifies life itself. She represents life in that the characters like her when things are going well, but resent her when things go sour. They take life, like Hannah, for granted. They don't know what they have. Elliot and Lee eventually end their affair. Lee marries her Lit. professor and Elliot chides himself for even thinking about leaving Hannah. He realizes the verity of Lee's earlier statement that Elliot loves Hannah more than he realizes. This line is similar to Mickey's when he first found out he might have a brain tumor. He wishes he could be as happy as he was earlier in the day. An aide says, "But Mickey, you were miserable," and he replies, "I was happy. I just didn't realize I was happy."

Allen's script is tight, filled with the oft-brilliant Woody wit. The film cleverly begins and ends on Thanksgiving dinners two years apart — Thanksgiving of course being a time to give thanks for what you have.

The city of New York almost becomes another character in this movie. Allen is careful never to separate his characters from their environment. He uses long tracking shots of characters dwarfed by the buildings behind them. The film was shot entirely on location and includes shots of such famous civic landmarks as the Waldorf Astoria, Mt. Sinai Hospital, and the RCA building.

Hannah and her Sisters is an excellent film because it is effective on all levels. It's a witty domestic drama that is also clearly and intelligently explores the insecurities inherent in the human condition.



Woody Allen and Mia Farrow in *Hannah and her Sisters*



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Albums

1. Euthanasia — Pro-Life (demo)
2. 39 Steps — 39 Steps (Line Records (Canada))
3. Screamin' Jay Hawkins & The Fuzztones — Live (Midnight (US))
4. Fastbacks — Seven Days (demo)
5. Zamboni Drivers — Skating Ghost/Drained Of Blood (Signpost (Canada))
6. The Colour Field — self-titled (Chrysalis/MCA)
7. Gordie Uranus — South Beach (SEED (Canada))
8. U-Men — Stop Spinning (Homestead/Dutch East India)
9. Langham Wheel — Again (demo)
10. Blue Trapeze — Sanctuary (Fullspeak (US))

Singles, EP's and Tapes

1. Mecca Normal — self-titled (Smarten UP! (Canada))
2. Denny Christenson Big Band — Doomsday Machine (Justin Time (Canada))
3. Various Artists: Deep Six — (C/Z Records (US))
4. Pere Ubu — Terminal Tower: An Archival Collection (Twintone (US))
5. Peter Nardini — Is There Anybody Out There? (Temple/Celtic)
6. Various Artists — Restless Variations (Restless Enigma(US))
7. Buckwheat Zydeco — Waitin' for my Ya Ya (Rounder/-Stony Plain)
8. Rhythm Mission — Wild Mood Swings (Mo-Da-Mu/Canada)
9. Elvis Costello — King of America (CBS)
10. Various Artists: 77KK — (77KK/New Rose) (France)

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