



Woody Allen directs Edward Norton and Drew Barrymore in *Everyone Says I Love You*.

Uptown Melodies

FOR SEVERAL DAYS now, a single raw potato has been sitting on the microwave in the kitchen. Who put it there, or for what purpose, no one seems to know. How long it will stay there, and who will move it to another site, no one dares imagine. It is a potato, and its biography is a mystery. For those with eyes to see, however, it is surely more than a misplaced vegetable. A philosopher might see it as a manifestation of the wonder of being, a theologian as a revelation of God's universe, a poet as an epiphany of beauty and a painter or photographer as an object of delight. Not for these capitulation to the tyranny of the commonplace.

Most of us mortals of lesser vision need artists to help us to savor the delights of the brute realities around us, from a simple thing like a potato to a sprawling reality like the Upper East Side of Manhattan. To look, to see, to be grateful for buildings, streets, parks, shops and every possible form and hue of the human person is to profit from the toil of poets and painters and to become more human in the process.

Everyone Says I Love You, Woody

Allen's new musical film, invites this level of contemplation; and, as mystics testify, such activity brings unimagined delight. Lest this ponderous prologue mislead the unwary, it's also a very funny and hugely entertaining movie. Under the skilled direction of photographer Carlo DiPalma, the camera takes on the role of landscape painter of extraordinary delicacy. The opening shots present a portfolio of scenes from Central Park robed in all its glorious springtime finery. Muggers, jovial psychotics and litter have magically vanished from the scene, because, in the style of all musicals, the film presents an idealized version of the truth.

ALLEN HEIGHTENS the romantic atmosphere by having D.J.—the name is a trendy Eastside reworking of Djuna—(Natasha Lyonne), serve as off-camera narrator for much of the story. D.J. has enough sophistication in the ways of the world to know exactly what is happening in shifting relationships around her, but she remains enough of a young girl to bring a sense of wonder to her insights. For her, love is still,

like, wonderful, you know, even if her parents and friends seem to make a botch of their romantic endeavors most of the time.

As the camera continues its scenic tour of the park, it rests on Holden (Edward Norton), who sings of love to his almost fiancée, Skylar (Drew Barrymore), both of whom are dressed like outtakes from a Lands' End catalogue, special preppie edition. The outfits and hair styles make it clear that they come from money, a lot of money, and are to the Eastside manor born. Holden breaks into song, protesting his love for Skylar. He doesn't sing very well, but that is part of the genius of the classic musicals. Fred Astaire didn't sing very well either. Every man in the audience believed he could sing (and if he had truly lost contact with reality, dance) just like Fred as he went dancing in the dark with Cyd Charisse. A bit later in the evolution of the genre, Howard Keel would make singing (and Gene Kelly dancing) a spectator sport. In musicals everyone can be as young, attractive, rich and idle as Holden and Skylar simply because we can sing like them. Or at least so we think. In this film all the actors sing except Drew Barrymore, and some of them can't carry a tune any better than we can. Woody Allen is truly awful, and thus ingratiating.

The musical reached its apogee in the 1950's at M.G.M., when Arthur Freed and his stable of great directors, like Vincente Minnelli, Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly created a total fantasy package by integrating narrative action and musical numbers into a cohesive whole. In keeping with the tradition, when Allen has his young lovers dance their way past the boutiques of Madison Avenue, even the mannequins in the windows join in their dance. A few scenes later, as Holden goes shopping for a ring at Harry Winston's, salespeople and customers—some of the tony ladies looking like refugees from a late Fellini film—burst into a song-and-dance routine. The ring is to be presented at Le Cirque that night. Skylar, unfortunately, attacks the whipped cream on the top of her desert with such bulimic frenzy that she fails to notice that Holden has replaced the customary cherry with Mr. Winston's diamonds. Gulp, and several thousands slip down the eager gullet. A quick trip to the emergency room at Lenox Hill Hospital leads into another lively dance number, featuring doctors, nurses, a lunatic in a straight-

jacket, a man in a body cast on a gurney and three huge, bathrobed mothers-to-be who refuse to let their delicate condition keep them from joining in the acrobatic fun.

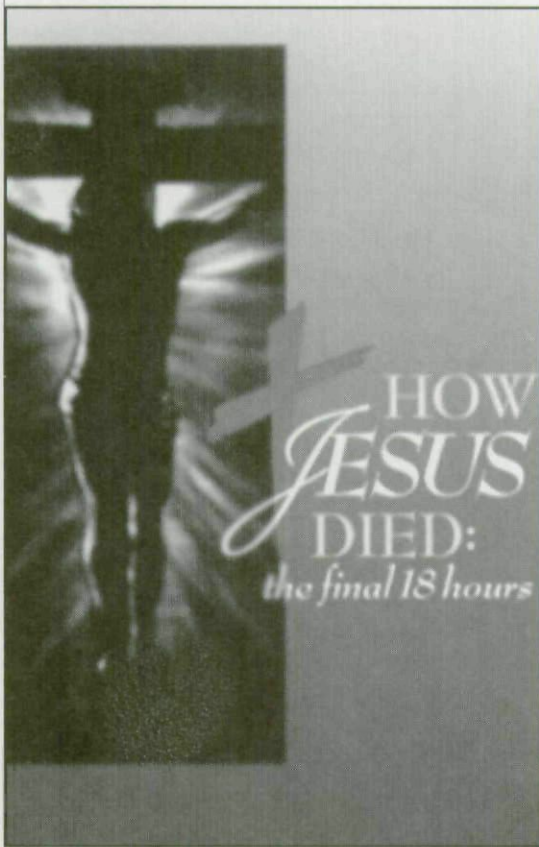
Gradually, Allen introduces Skylar's family. Her mother Steffi (Goldie Hawn), ever guilty about her inherited wealth, espouses every liberal cause of the hour. Not one to let her money do all the talking, she delivers an impassioned plea to hire interior decorators to help convicts remodel their cells. The audience of uniformed New York City cops

does not seem overly impressed. Bob (Alan Alda), Skylar's stepfather, is long-suffering; presiding as he does over a household of adolescent girls melded from two earlier marriages, he has to be. Fortunately for them and him, he never discovers that the girls' chief amusement involves spying on a psychiatrist and her patients in an adjacent apartment. Bob has enough trouble with his ne'er-do-well son Scott (Lukas Haas), who has begun reading *The National Review* and would like to execute all convicts before his mother has

a chance to redecorate their cells. The eventual explanation for this morbid pathology draws the biggest laugh in the film.

Skylar's biological father, Joe Berlin (Woody Allen), lives in Paris; like many of the characters Allen has played in recent years, he is a writer and has no apparent worries about money. He is lonely, however, a condition his daughters hope to remedy by arranging a meeting with Von (Julia Roberts), armed with information about her private life they have gathered at the psychiatrist's knothole. In the meantime, Skylar interrupts her engagement to Holden to pursue Charles Ferry (Tim Roth), one of her mother's friends from the Big House on the Hudson. His rendition of "If I Had You" has a certain urgency to it that the songwriter might not have intended. Their romance can best be called an adventure.

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John Dauer, Producer/Director

Trinity Pictures

VON AND JOE meet in Venice, where DiPalma's painterly camera captures the candle-lit gardens and luminous canals with reverence for their unimaginable beauty. During the Christmas holidays, the families converge in Paris, where Joe has taken an apartment in Montmartre in the shadow of the Sacre Coeur. Again the visual effect is breathtaking. On Christmas eve, they plan to attend a splendid party for the equally rich, and it appears that this will be the occasion for the final resolution of their various romantic escapades. Allen, however, will not let us take the denouement too seriously. All the guests at the party, men and women alike, wear Groucho Marx mustaches and brandish huge cigars. In a manic instant the ballroom turns into a stage filled with Groucho impersonators dancing and singing in French. It's all make-believe, Allen reminds us. His characters are fictions, actors playing roles in disguise.

Allen has one more trick lurking behind his Groucho disguise, however. Joe and Steffi leave the party, and as they walk along the Seine, they reminisce about their lives together and apart. The words lead into song and dance. Naturally. This is a musical. The choreography reflects their history with each other. It is the ultimate triumph of fantasy over reality. Even gravity exerts no control over them. They have loved and will love, and draw delight from the moments of happiness that love has given them.

Sometimes a potato is only a potato. Sometimes it is something much more. So is a musical. So is a love story.

RICHARD A. BLAKE

