

Document Citation

Title	'Aphrodite' just too precious to work for Allen
Author(s)	Barry Caine
Source	<i>Oakland Tribune</i>
Date	1995 Oct 27
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	Cue-1, Cue-4
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Mighty Aphrodite, Allen, Woody, 1995

'Aphrodite' just too precious to work for Allen

By Barry Caine
STAFF WRITER

'Mighty Aphrodite,' Woody Allen's newest look at relationship foibles, is a gimmick-laden venture that recalls some of his earlier outings.

In 1973's "Sleeper," for instance, giant vegetables and loony futuristic machines shared credits with the stars. In 1975's "Love and Death," the filmmaker gave a walk-on to the Grim Reaper.

Those were amusing and enhancing contrivances that complemented the storytelling.

In "Mighty Aphrodite," which opens today, Allen's gadget is a Greek chorus that comments on the action, interacts with Allen's character and eventually transposes into a chorus line that performs "When You're Smiling," while still in traditional masks and robes.

The chorus complements the idea that much of life is influenced by Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love. The device is

cute and clever, especially at the story's start and finish. In between, however, it becomes increasingly intrusive, annoying and distracting. Maybe the message is, Beware of

Please see Mighty, CUE-4



Michael Rapaport and Mira Sorvino team up in Woody Allen's "Mighty Aphrodite."

REVIEW

- "Mighty Aphrodite"
- Starring Woody Allen, Mira Sorvino and Helena Bonham Carter
- Directed by Woody Allen
- At the Cinema 21 in San Francisco (Opens in the East Bay Nov. 3)
- Rated PG-13
- ★★ (Awkward)

Mighty: Allen's movie ends on upbeat note

Continued from CUE-1

Greeks.

A middle-of-the-road Allen offering, "Mighty Aphrodite" is a fluffy comedy that's heavy on silliness but light on soul.

The plot centers on Lenny and Amanda Weintraub (Allen and Helena Bonham Carter), a happily married, upwardly mobile couple who adopt a baby boy. (The idea was reportedly inspired by Allen and then-heartthrob Mia Farrow's adopting a baby in their happier days.)

As the years pass, the couple become busier and more self-absorbed. Their passion on hiatus, Lenny embarks on a quest to find his child's real mother. Obsessing over her identity is apparently easier than dwelling on an unfulfilling marriage.

Discovering his bright son's real mother is Linda (Mira Sorvino), a good-hearted but slow-witted hooker who aspires to be an actress, Lenny decides to play God. He encourages Linda to straighten out her life. He even plays matchmaker, trying to fix her up with Kevin (Michael Rapaport), a not-very-good boxer who wants to become an onion farmer.

It's an amusing scenario that provides plenty of chuckles, but not a lot of insight into humanity or love. (When Lenny finds himself at-

tracted to a woman who is not his wife, he says, "It was the first time I had any of those thoughts. It made me nervous." That's about as deep as it gets.)

"Mighty Aphrodite" ends on an up beat. And, consistent with Greek theater, it provides a sort of *deus ex machina* to ensure happily ever after. However, the finish is not particularly satisfying.

As an actor, Allen is Allen is Allen. Sportswriter Lenny acts jittery, driven, insecure and prone to one-liners. (When he learns Linda has six dates later that night, he says, "I wish I had the penicillin concession in your apartment.")

Sorvino ("Quiz Show," "Barcelona") is a treat as the vulnerable, sincere but dumb Linda. The actress gives her character a high-pitched voice that almost sounds like she's on helium. It's annoying at first, but eventually seems to fit. Linda's the most likable character in the film.

Carter doesn't get much to do as Lenny's wife, Amanda, but she turns in a competent performance. F. Murray Abraham, Olympia Dukakis and David Ogden Stiers show up as members of the Greek chorus, taking you away from the story as you dwell momentarily on their celebrity.

The whole thing is a little too precious.