

## Document Citation

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VENICE

MIGHTY APHRODITE

A Miramax release from Sweetland Films of a Jean Doumanian production. Produced by Robert Greenhut. Executive producers, Doumanian, J.E. Beaucaire. Co-executive producers, Jack Rollins, Charles H. Joffe, Letty Aronson. Co-producer, Helen Robin.

Directed, written by Woody Allen. Camera (DuArt color; Technicolor prints), Carlo DiPalma; editor, Susan E. Morse; production design, Santo Loquasto; art direction, Tom Warren, Gianni Giovannoni (Italy); set decoration, Susan Bode; costume design, Jeffrey Kurland; sound (Dolby SR), Gary Alper; associate producer/assistant director, Thomas Reilly; casting, Juliet Taylor. Reviewed at Aidikoff screening room, Beverly Hills, Aug. 25, 1995. (In Venice Film Festival — noncompeting; also in Toronto Film Festival.) MPAA Rating: R. Running time: 95 MIN.

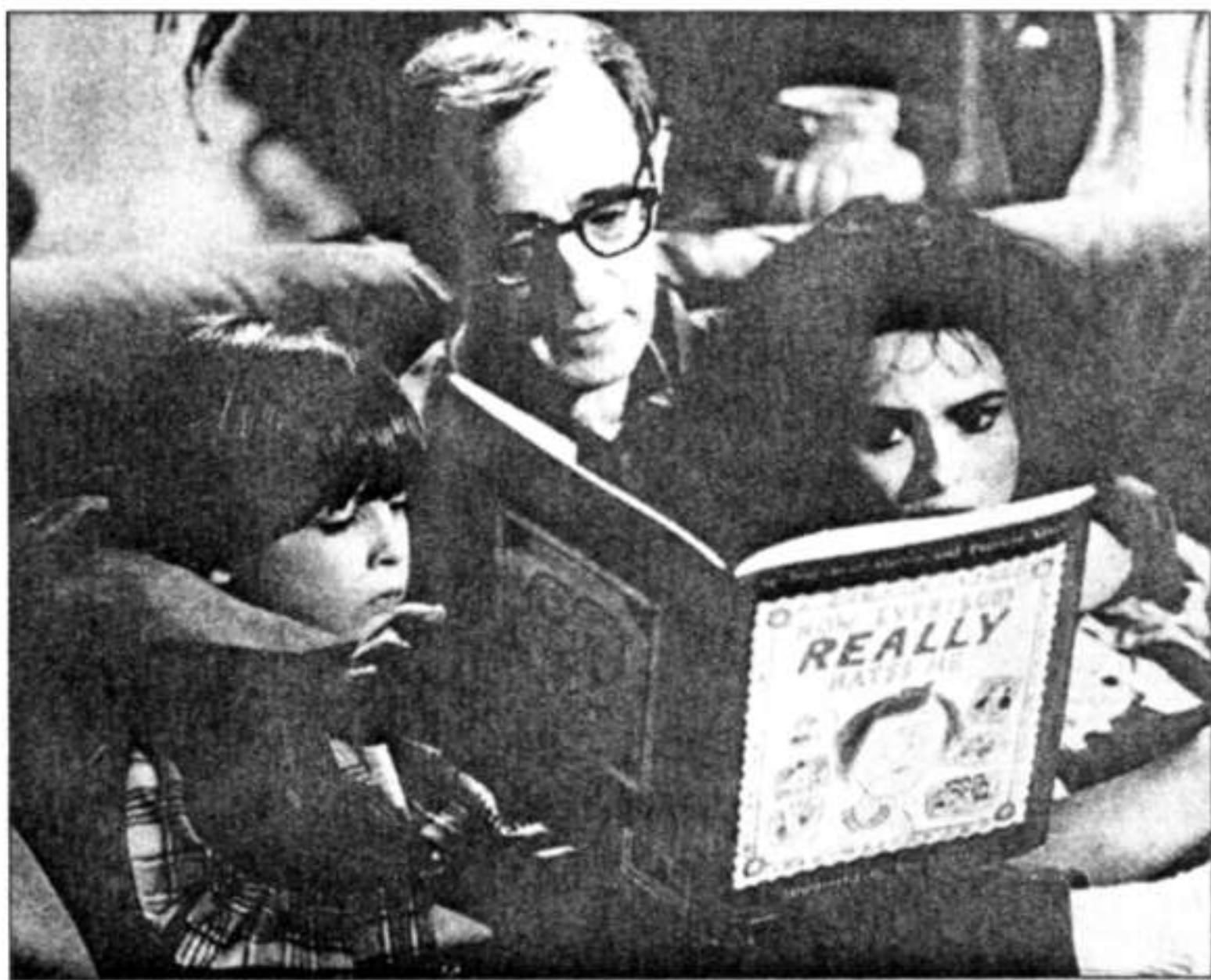
Lenny ..... Woody Allen  
 Amanda ..... Helena Bonham Carter  
 Linda Ash ..... Mira Sorvino  
 Kevin ..... Michael Rapaport  
 Leader ..... F. Murray Abraham  
 Amanda's Mother ..... Claire Bloom  
 Jocasta ..... Olympia Dukakis  
 Laius ..... David Ogden Stiers  
 Tiresias ..... Jack Warden  
 Jerry Bender ..... Peter Weller  
 Ricky, the Pimp ..... Dan Moran

**W**oody Allen takes a comic, only slightly skeptical look at his compulsion to rescue wayward young women in *"Mighty Aphrodite,"* a zippy, frothy confection that emerges as agreeable middle-range Woody. Dominated by a striking performance from Mira Sorvino as a sweet-tempered hooker who gets a break from an unexpected source, this second Allen picture for Miramax re-treads familiar turf, both geographically and neurotically, and appears destined for just OK biz outside the bastions of the filmmaker's loyal supporters.

After a surprising opening in which a mock Greek chorus in an ancient amphitheater sets the stage for a classical tragedy, action cuts to the more customary ambience of an upscale Gotham restaurant, where Allen's middle-aged Lenny fulminates to his wife, Amanda (Helena Bonham Carter), and another couple against the idea of adopting children. Before the viewer can recover from the autobiographical implications of this tirade, Lenny and Amanda are bringing home an adopted infant son, prompting a funny but dubiously close-to-home laundry list of names sportswriter Lenny might consider giving the tyke: Groucho, Sugar Ray, Earl the Pearl, Thelonious, and so on.

A few years down the line, Lenny is so impressed with his son that he decides the kid's real mom must be some kind of genius. Spurred also by his growing unhappiness with the self-centered Amanda, who can only think about her new art gallery, Lenny sets out to find his son's biological mother, despite the Greek chorus's angry advice ("Don't be a schmuck!").

With a little stealth, Lenny is able to track his prey, but instead of finding a saint with a 150 IQ, he learns that she's a prostitute apparently named Linda Ash, but who also goes by the memorable nom de porno of Judy Cum. With the stern Greek chorus leader (F. Murray Abraham) acting as his conscience, Lenny makes a date with Linda (Sorvino) and encounters an incredibly statuesque bimbo whose amiable nature prevails over her notable life scars.



**BRINGING UP BABY:** Woody Allen and Helena Bonham Carter are a Manhattan couple who adopt a child (Jimmy McQuaid) in Allen's new comedy, *"Mighty Aphrodite,"* which screened at the Venice fest.

Pic takes a sharp turn here from being yet another portrait of Woody as beleaguered, misunderstood mate of a hopelessly neurotic woman to a Guardian Angel fantasy that contains echoes of the Mariel Hemingway section of *"Manhattan,"* *"Broadway Danny Rose"* and *"Husbands and Wives,"* among other earlier films. Without succumbing to her tempting sexual offers or tipping his hand about his real agenda, Lenny befriends this guileless young lady, learns that her greatest regret was giving up her baby, and resolves to help her change her life.

The first obstacle to this ambition is Ricky the Pimp (Dan Moran), who has no interest in letting one of his best girls go. The second necessity is finding an appropriate match for Linda. With the chorus warning him against "playing God" and his own marriage threatening to crumble in the wake of Amanda's affair with smooth operator Jerry Bender (Peter Weller), Lenny fixes up a wary Linda with straight-arrow young boxer Kevin (Michael Rapaport). Things don't work out quite as Lenny first imagines, but the snappy ending reflects an extremely optimistic view of romantic entanglements compared with Allen's usual view of man-woman relationships.

Fast approaching the age when even Cary Grant refused to continue playing romantic scenes opposite young actresses, Allen might advisedly consider dropping such perennial shtick as having very young women fall in love with him and his anxiety about having children; the latter seems like an issue he should have long since dealt with, while the former feels a tad unbecoming at this point. Fortunately, his Lenny functions here mostly as a flustered, fleet-footed go-between with a generous heart that counterbalances his proudly worn neuroses.

There is perhaps a bit too much of the chorus galavanting about delivering their increasingly colloquial admonitions and too few convulsive laughs, but the writer-director has generally pitched the humor at a pleasing and relatively consistent level. Bonham Carter, sporting an Allen-inflected American accent, looks pale and almost otherworldly in what has recently been the Judy Davis part.

But the film's biggest surprise, and attraction, is Sorvino. Hair dyed blondish, towering over her diminutive co-star, threatening at any moment to burst out of her tight

sweaters and dresses and talking dirty in a high-pitched, flatly uninflected voice, this exciting young actress goes way beyond the whore-with-a-heart-of-gold externals of the part in developing a deeply sympathetic and appealing character. None of the diverse roles she has done to date would have suggested her for this part, but this gutsy performance will put her much more prominently on the map.

Contributions by such Allen regulars as cinematographer Carlo DiPalma and production designer Santo Loquasto have given the film a particularly warm look, and a vintage song score is used to fine advantage. Amphitheater scenes, which involve some of the principals at times, were shot in Sicily.

—Todd McCarthy