

film listings



Please Give

D: Nicole Holofcener; with Catherine Keener, Oliver Platt, Rebecca Hall, Amanda Peet, Sarah Steele, Ann Guilbert, Lois Smith, Thomas Ian Nicholas. (R, 90 min.)

Spending time in the company of writer/director Holofcener's characters is a treat that comes around too infrequently. Her films capture snatches of life and conversations that are resonant and recognizable, contemporary

and complex, precise yet open-ended in their presentation and meaning. Holofcener's world is drenched in familiarity, especially in its focus on women, their interior lives, and their complicated feelings about body image. Yet this Manhattan-set movie also captures a sense of the present-day economic reality in America in its depiction of the growing gulf between the haves and have-nots and the ever-increasing sense of guilt the privileged feel regarding their altruistic impulses – or lack thereof. From the very opening images of *Please Give*, it is clear that Holofcener is determined to show us aspects of women's lives rarely explored in feature films. One by one, we see breasts of every size, shape, and skin color plopped onto the glass plate of a mammogram X-ray machine while the Roches sing in amusing counterpoint on the soundtrack. Automatically, we are dropped into Holofcener's unseen world of women and the dissonance between viewing breasts for their cultural and sexual contexts and as "tubes of potential danger" as Rebecca (Hall), the radiology tech, refers to them. Rebecca is the granddaughter of crotchety Andra (marvelously played by Guilbert, who will be best remembered as the next-door neighbor, Millie Helper, on *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, or perhaps in a different decade as one of the Del Boca Vista neighbors on *Seinfeld*). Andra lives in the apartment next door to Kate (played by Holofcener mainstay Keener) and Alex (Platt), whose desire to purchase and

break through the walls of Andra's apartment after her death is a well-known secret. Kate frets about the responsibilities of privilege and gives generously to panhandlers on the street and makes a few tragicomic attempts at volunteer opportunities. Recently, she has become concerned about the business ethics she and Alex practice in their vintage furniture store: specifically, buying pieces for a pittance from children of deceased elders and then reselling the items in their store for a substantial profit. Other central characters include Kate and Alex's daughter, Abby (Steele), whose acne-pocked face is a walking poster for body-image issues, and Rebecca's unhappy sister Mary (Peet), who gives facials in a day spa. There's a sexual infidelity and a few other incidents, but the pleasure of *Please Give* lies in its conversations rather than its plot. In fact, the film's attempt to bring all the character arcs together toward the end results in frustrations similar to most attempts at achieving simultaneous climax. Some of what's so lovely about *Please Give* is its very reluctance to spell out exactly what the characters have learned and its acceptance of the prickliness that is essential to so many of their natures. In the past, I have used the word "perambulating" to describe Holofcener's characters, and it's as good a word here as ever. A stroll with these characters is a refreshing break from the usual film exercises. – Marjorie Baumgarten



new reviews

THE A-TEAM D: Joe Carnahan; with Liam Neeson, Bradley Cooper, Jessica Biel, Quinton Jackson, Sharlto Copley. (PG-13, 117 min.)

Not reviewed at press time. The director of *Narc* and *Smokin' Aces* turns his attention to this screen version of the action TV show about a renegade group of Army Rangers who become a covert operations team. The film's good casting may just overcome the absence of the original Mr. T. – Marjorie Baumgarten

THE CITY OF YOUR FINAL DESTINATION D: James Ivory; with Omar Metwally, Anthony Hopkins, Laura Linney, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Hiroyuki Sanada, Alexandra Maria Lara, Norma Aleandro. (PG-13, 118 min.)

Although the initial screen credit heralds *The City of Your Final Destination* as a Merchant Ivory Film, the movie was directed by Ivory after the death of his longtime producing partner Ismail Merchant. The story is contemporary, unlike so many of the Merchant Ivory costumed affairs (*Howards End*, *Mr. & Mrs. Bridge*), yet has a place-out-of-time feel that would be appropriate to most any era. Based on a novel by Peter Cameron, the script is by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, the screenwriter responsible for most of the Merchant Ivory canon. Typical of a Merchant Ivory film, *The City of Your Final Destination* exudes a tasteful quality and style: It is exquisitely cast, lovely to look at and listen to, finely edited, and so on. The film has all the trappings of drama



but no frisson. There is a central mystery, characters come and go, and overwhelming emotions are spoken of but hardly seen. The actors are all superb and capable of holding us rapt. But, by the end, we are left with much less than meets the eye. Omar (Metwally) is an American professor of literature who is seeking authorization from a dead novelist's relatives to write a biography of him. His initial query was rejected by the novelist's relatives – the executors of Jules Gunds' literary estate – so Omar travels to Uruguay to coax them in person. Arriving unannounced at the Gunds' pastoral estate, Omar is generously given shelter by the family who nevertheless withholds permission for the biography. His primary opponent is the widow, Caroline (Linney), a haughty but sad woman who offers no rationale for her reluctance. More receptive are Gunds' brother Adam (Hopkins), a gay man living with his much younger Japanese lover in a separate house, and Jules Gunds' live-in mistress, Arden (Gainsbourg). Intriguing information about all these characters slowly comes to light but ultimately reveals no greater truths. Also part of the story is Omar's overbearing girlfriend, Dierdre (Lara). Even though the film never drags, its story is very slight and inconsequential. When you get to the end of *The City of Your Final Destination*, you may discover that there is no there there. – Marjorie Baumgarten

THE KARATE KID D: Harald Zwart; with Jaden Smith, Jackie Chan, Taraji P. Henson, Wenwen Han. (PG, 140 min.)

Not reviewed at press time. An American boy in China learns martial arts from a master in this remake of the Ralph Macchio and Pat Morita kids' classic. – Marjorie Baumgarten

KILLERS D: Robert Luketic; with Ashton Kutcher, Katherine Heigl, Tom Selleck, Catherine O'Hara, Katheryn Winnick, Kevin Sussman, Lisa Ann Walter, Casey Wilson, Rob Riggle, Martin Mull. (PG-13, 100 min.)

Heigl reteams here with her director of *The Ugly Truth* to see, apparently, if they could stoop any lower. The sad truth is that they can and did, although the sully quality of the hackneyed script by Bob DeRosa and Ted Griffin is a not-insubstantial factor in this tedious romp. Premise:

openings & ratings

The A-Team (PG-13)

The City of Your Final Destination (PG-13)

The Karate Kid (PG)

- ★★★★★ As perfect as a movie can be
- ★★★★ Slightly flawed, but excellent nonetheless
- ★★★ Has its good points, and its bad points

Living in Emergency: Stories of Doctors Without Borders (NR)

Please Give (R)

- ★★ Mediocre, but with one or two bright spots
- ★ Poor, without any saving graces
- ☹ La bomba