

Human Beings Have Three Lives: Public, Private and Secret

Natasha Lardera (April 07, 2016)



Perfect Strangers is an ensemble film featuring Valerio Mastandrea in the role of Lele, Anna Foglietta in the role of his wife Carlotta, Kasia Smutniak in the role of Eva, Marco Giallini in the role of her husband Rocco, Alba Rohrwacher in the role of Bianca, Edoardo Leo in the role of her husband Cosimo and Giuseppe Battiston in the role of Peppe, the only single guy. Directed by Paolo Genovese, Perfect Strangers is going to be competing at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival in the International Narrative Competition.

Just a couple of days ago an ex sent me a naked picture of himself posing in front of the bathroom mirror. It all started with him wanting to show me his vacation beard. Instead I saw more than that, and I am not talking about his muscles, but I am talking about his current girlfriend's bathroom. This guy was there with her in the other room and sending private pictures to me. It really made me wonder what people hide in their phones and how easy it is to just connect with anybody.

And then, call it a coincidence, I had to watch Paolo Genovese's Perfetti Sconosciuti (PerfectStrangers) because it is going to be competing at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival in the International Narrative Competition. It was like it was speaking to me.

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in the role of his wife Carlotta, Kasia Smutniak in the role of Eva, Marco Giallini in the role of her husband Rocco, Alba Rohrwacher in the role of Bianca, Edoardo Leo in the role of her husband Cosimo and Giuseppe Battiston in the role of Peppe, the only single guy.

As the film starts we see every couple get ready for a dinner together and the cell phones in their lives already play a central role. We see Lele sitting on the toilet pretending to be going to the bathroom but in reality he is sending a message, obviously not to his wife in the room next door or to a coworker. In the same apartment we see that as they are about to leave Carlotta lies that she has forgotten the phone but what she really has to do is take her panties off (we will find out why later in the film). Across town in their apartment, Bianca, who is a vet, is on the phone talking to a concerned client, while her husband Cosimo is trying to seduce her.

At Rocco and Eva's house, the viewer is introduced to people's curiosity to know what is going on in other people's lives. Eva, who is a therapist, was going through Sofia's, her daughter, purse, as going through her phone would be impossible, and she found a brand new box of condoms. This causes a sense of uneasiness between mother and daughter, that seems characteristic of their relationship. There is a reason why old sayings still exist and when faced with reality all it is easy to wonder if "ignorance is bliss."

After this brief, yet very efficient introduction, Cosimo and Bianca, the newlyweds of the group, Lele and Carlotta, a long lasting couple that seems to have problems of communication, and Peppe, a recently divorced guy who has no job and has a new girlfriend that nobody has met, are all going over for dinner at Eva and Rocco's house. Eva and Rocco also are a couple in crisis, their love for each other is obvious but there are things that seem to remain unsaid, they have a teenage daughter that is difficult to handle and that is causing rupture between the spouses and Eva's continuous need to over analyze everything is definitely not helping.

Despite the joy of all being together for a fun night, the overall mood is not the most relaxed. Unhappy couples whisper sarcastic digs about each other or avoid getting into serious matters. Everybody was curious to meet Peppe's latest girl but unfortunately she is home with the flu, so the night's biggest attraction has dissipated.

What brings the group together is the beauty of a lunar eclipse, which they all observe from the balcony. Despite their unique beauty, it is common knowledge that all kinds of wild beliefs are linked to eclipses, and there's actually proof in both history and in the modern day that eclipses can make people do all sorts of weird things, ranging from the bizarre to the wonderful.

Indeed, out of the blue, during dinner, Eva suggests they play a game: everybody should put their phone on the table, face up, sound on, read aloud every message they receive and take every call and put it on speaker without revealing what is going on. This is a way to prove to everybody that there are no secrets, nothing to hide. Needless to say there are plenty of things that the friends don't know about each other, and that spouses are keeping hidden.

So between a serving of eggplant fritters and a glass of biodynamic wine, the sounds start - the typical whatsapp ring of when you get a message or a photo, the fun frog ringtone and the old time classic by Gloria Gaynor "I will Survive" interrupt conversations and become the center of a downward spiral that can't be stopped and that spares none.

Perfect Strangers successfully proves that you can be married to, or be friends with, someone for decades and the person you share your life with day after day has a side you absolutely know nothing about. But it also proves that social media, from facebook to instagram or whatsapp, make it easier to behave a certain way with total strangers. Magically those people you have never talked to are not strangers anymore, they become someone you can be comfortable with to the point of sending a sexy selfie of you every night at the same time. What's astounding is the superficiality with which this is done without even taking into consideration the consequences of certain behaviors.

Perfect Strangers, which has been nominated to 8 Davide di Donatello Awards, Italy's Academy Awards, is masterfully shot in an apartment, mostly around the dining table, with a cast of actors that



amazes with their ease in delivering dialogues and actions. Smartphones, the other protagonists of this story, are also given the importance they deserve, as the black boxes of our life.

Perfect Strangers @ Tribeca Film Festival Showtimes

6:15 PM - THU 4/14 @ Regal Cinemas Battery Park

4:45 PM - FRI 4/15 @ Regal Cinemas Battery Park

10:00 PM - SAT 4/16 @ Bow Tie Cinemas Chelsea

3:45 PM - MON 4/18 @ Bow Tie Cinemas Chelsea

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