

Tension in family relations charmingly portrayed in film

By Julie Naughton
Senior Editor

A family of reserved Italian Catholics meets an expansive Lithuanian in "Once Around," and the combination is explosive.

The Bellas form a tight-knit Italian Catholic family that lives in a Boston suburb. The parents, Marilyn (Gena Rowlands) and Joe (Danny Aiello) and their daughters, Renata (Holly Hunter) and Jan (Laura San Giacomo) are happily plodding through their lives as the film opens. Younger daughter Jan is about to marry, and Renata is pressuring her boyfriend (Griffin Dunne) for a proposal.

When he says no, the stage is set for Renata's adventure to begin.

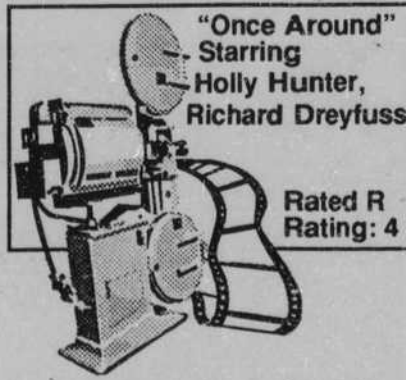
After Jan's wedding, Renata heads to Saint Martin to learn to sell condominiums. There she meets and falls for super-salesman Sam Sharpe (Richard Dreyfuss). He's the king of condo sales, a brash, generous, bawdy guy nearly twice Renata's age.

Sam is lonely, and so is Renata. She's charmed by his constant stream of off-color jokes and Lithuanian proverbs. He's allured by her total adoration of him. They immediately fall in love against the backdrop of spectacular Saint Martin sunsets and decide to marry soon after.

Sam, who is extremely rich, lavishes everything imaginable on Renata — the gift-wrapped red Mercedes wedding present, the Christian Dior wedding gown and the beach front apartment. Eager for a loving family — his own large, warm Lithuanian family is dead — he presents the Bella family with extravagant gifts, too.

The Bellas are unsure about how to deal with this overbearing Lithuanian, and tension begins to eat away at them.

The classic struggle is seen as the overly coddled Renata breaks away from her family and marries Sam. The family seems to feel that no one is good enough for Renata. This leads



to some spectacular confrontations, and Renata finally is forced to get a backbone and tell her self-centered family that she's a big girl now.

"He's trying to buy her," one Bella is overheard saying to another at the wedding. The bitchy comments continue through the wedding. Soon after the wedding, Renata gets pregnant, and the bitter remarks intensify.

"This is my adventure," she screams at her parents after one battle. They

tell her that Sam is no longer welcome in their house, and she replies that if Sam isn't welcome in their house, then she and their daughter aren't welcome in the house, either.

After a great deal of family stress, the Bellas finally accept Sam. The way this is done is nice. Renata sticks up for her husband and the Bellas learn to be a little less self-centered. For his part, Sam tries to become less offensive to the Bellas.

Unfortunately, the idyllic moments don't last. Sam has a heart attack at his daughter's christening, and the tension starts building again as the Bellas begin to worry about his health.

There are some truly touching moments here, especially when Aiello carries an ailing Dreyfuss up the stairs of the Bella home.

Dreyfuss and Hunter, otherwise known as the king and queen of nervous tension, have a certain charm in their roles.

Dreyfuss — looking a lot older than in recent pictures — is believ-

able as the sincere yet obnoxious Sam.

Hunter's character is typical of her roles: Renata is hypersensitive, easily moved to tears, jumpy and uptight. But Hunter immediately endears herself to the audience, just as she has done in other films. The only sore point of the portrayal is her forced Boston accent. It just misses being authentic, and distracts from Hunter's gentle portrayal of Renata.

Aiello, perhaps best known for his Academy Award-nominated role in Spike Lee's "Do the Right Thing," is excellent as Joe. Joe is uncomfortable as he sees Sam taking over the role that he's always held in the family: the expansive speechmaker, the king of emotion. Aiello convincingly portrays this feeling.

And San Giacomo, fresh from acclaimed performances in "sex, lies and videotape" and "Pretty Woman," is charming as Jan.

"Once Around" is playing at the Cooper Theatre, 54th and O streets.

Kronos

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Kronos' performance of Hamza El Din's composition, "Escalay (The Water Wheel)" featured a stirring piece of Egyptian influences.

Joan Jeanreud's tense cello provided the dense sound and a coursing bass melody, which served as the rhythm section. Utilizing a discordant sound as part of the voice of the chorus, the sense of stress powered the piece forward, feeling like an

actual water wheel.

The urgency-building within "Escalay (The Water Wheel)" is purposeful. Composer El Din claims "the message of the piece is that God doesn't want the sacrifice of human beings, but till now it is still happening everywhere."

More evidence of the power of dissonance was found in Kronos' performance of Peter Sculthorpe's "Jabiru Dreaming."

Featuring a survey of discordant hums, each member played the separate phrases distinctly — coursing

together for one sound.

The sound of the piece was reminiscent of the string section in Propaganda's dark pop masterpiece, "Dr. Mabuse" from Kronos' 1985 debut, "A Secret Wish."

"Dreaming" also seemed to feature a thorough study of "new age" music master Phillip Glass and his style of layering melodies that otherwise would not go together. This interspersing of melodic and discordant seems an important and powerful trademark to the power of the Kronos Quartet.

Sticking to its longtime tradition of impressive encores, Kronos did not disappoint Saturday night.

"Tillaboyo," or "Sunset," featured a warm and gentle sound with a bit of playfulness, sounding almost like a round of pop-styled music. "Sunset" was a much simpler piece with an ambient sound, which gave the feeling of taking a walk at sunset.

Kronos' final offering was a clever Steve Mackie arrangement of Bo Diddley's "Roadrunner." The twang and screech of Kronos' driving pace was musically perfect and thoroughly

entertaining — just as Bo would have liked it.

Imagine — a string quartet playing Bo Diddley.

What else could you ask for from an evening from Kronos?

Hanna

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"And may I say, Oprah," Dirk continued. "I support Operation Desert Storm."

Even more applause. I was somewhat uncomfortable with the direction the show was headed. Still, I assumed the show would head down a more palatable path.

"Our next guest is Karla Killjoy, a single mother of seven from Skokie, Ill."

Submissive applause from the audience.

"Hello, Oprah and thank you for having me on the show," Karla said. "My deadbeat husband forced me to live in a personal hell for nearly 14 years. He was lazy, fat and rude. He wouldn't help care for our children, and I did all of the housework. When I found out he was having an affair, that's where I drew the line."

"Could you tell us how you responded to your husband's affair?" Oprah asked.

"I ran him over with our pickup." Tumultuous applause from the audience.

"What next?" Oprah asked.

"Well, he wasn't dead, but he was close. I threw his broken body into the back of the truck with all of his belongings, drove him over to his mistress' house and said 'Here, you can have him.' Then I dumped him on her porch and threw a fire bomb in her window."

A standing ovation from the crowd. "And I support Operation Desert Storm."

Several hands in the audience began to bleed as the applause reached a deafening roar.

The person sitting directly to my left spoke up.

"Oprah, I'd like to add something, if I may."

"Oh, yes," said Oprah. "The next person on our panel is not here as a normal American. She is a psychologist specializing in broad generalizations and self-important psychobabble. Her book is entitled 'Women Who Think They Might Love Too Much But Are Not Sure and the Men Who Abandon Them Because of Their Own Fear of Opening Up and Being Emotional.' May I introduce Mimi Caruthers."

Conformable applause from the audience.

"What we're finding, Oprah, is that too many American women are looking in the mirror and not liking who they see. They need to do some self-evaluation and be able to look at that person in the mirror and say, 'Hey, I am somebody and I have

something to say. I really like me.' And what we're finding, Oprah, is that when they do that, they're able to quit loving their oppressors and start loving themselves. And that's important."

A few hands went up in the audience.

"Yes, ma'am, you have something to say," said Oprah, sticking her mike in an audience member's face.

"Yes. I wanted to go back to Dirk and ask him how he prepared his parent's flesh when he ate them," she asked.

"It was stir-fry," Dirk replied succinctly.

Oprah moved to another audience member.

"I don't really have a question. I just wanted to say that I love this country and those who don't should just move to Russia. Hip-hip-hooray for the U.S.A.!" he said.

The audience nearly killed itself clapping.

"Before we take more questions,

let's go to our last normal person, a college student from Lincoln, Neb. Welcome, Jim Hanna."

"Thank you, Oprah," I said. "What would you like to know?"

"Let's start with the obvious. Have you ever killed anyone?" she asked.

"Uh... no Oprah, I haven't."

"Oh. Have you ever been unfaithful in a relationship?"

"No, I guess I haven't," I said.

"Hmm, ever been to a psychologist?"

Another no.

"Jeez, you're odd," Oprah said. "Have you ever hit a woman, or molested a child or had plastic surgery?"

No, no, no.

The audience stirred uncomfortably.

"You're not normal at all. Isn't there anything you can tell us to convince us you're normal?"

"Well, I'm a college student with a stable social life, no history of drug or alcohol abuse, who gets along pretty

well with every member of my family. What can I say?"

The audience stared in dumb silence.

"And may I add, I don't support Operation Desert Storm."

A cry went up from the crowd. Oprah signaled to security guards who rushed to the stage and yanked me out of the studio. As I was being dragged out, I could hear Mimi Caruthers.

"What I think we have here is a person who obviously didn't get the love he needed as a child and is looking for attention through obnoxious public displays of non-conformity"

The guards threw me out the front door of the studio. Then I, in all of my weirdness, caught a taxi to O'Hare Airport and I flew home to continue my life as a freak.

Hanna is a senior theater arts major and a Daily Nebraskan arts and entertainment senior reporter and columnist.



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