

British film unique story of dysfunctional family life

By Mark Nemeth
Staff Reporter



Courtesy of the Ross Theater

"Life is Sweet," showing this weekend at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater, is about a suburban British family.

Mike Leigh's new film, "Life is Sweet," is a unique, dry and unsensationalized story of a nurturing but dysfunctional suburban British family and its slightly eccentric everyday life.

Jane Horrocks plays Nicola, a bulimic cigarette-smoker. Nicola is idealistic and pessimistic and has a passive-aggressive relationship with chocolate; she can only enjoy sex with her boyfriend when he licks chocolate from her chest. He refuses sometimes, saying, "I'm not hungry."

Nicola's teen-age anger and rebelliousness is attractive. She is a 1992 British punk rocker. Though bulimia generally does not entertain, Nicola's bulimia is yet another food relationship Leigh explores, as each character's life somehow surrounds food or sex.

Though mostly charming in its perversity, parts of "Life is Sweet" seem meaninglessly contrived for their strangeness.

"Life is Sweet" is Mike Leigh's fourth film. Like his others (including "High Hopes"), it unfolds naturally and with a bizarre warmth. "Life is Sweet" may not appeal to everyone because of its heavy British accents and its lack of "beautiful people."

"Life is Sweet" is playing at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater Thursday through Saturday and May 7-10. Screenings are 7 and 9 p.m. with Saturday matinees at 1 and 3 p.m.

Wine

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it's definitely an acquired taste. In fact, many people never get used to the dry ones, so don't feel bad if you loathe them at first.

The Germans are internationally known for their command of sweet white wines, and every good restaurant will have at least one or two.

Ask for a Piesporter (pee-z-porter) to start off with. It's light, crisp, sweet and fruity, perfect for a beginner. Another great white is Liebfraumilch (lee-b-frow-milsh). It's usually not as sweet, but it's close. Both of these wines are made from the Riesling (re-sling) grape.

If you see a Gewurztraminer (gaverts-tra-meaner) on the list, try it. It's sweet, yet spicy at the same time. I've never met a sweet-wine fan who didn't like a good Gewurztraminer. If you find these wines a bit too

sweet, as I do, you might want to try some in the medium range. I would suggest a Fumé Blanc (foo-may blonk) or a Sauvignon Blanc (this one has a silent "g"; think of mignon, as in the file). Usually, the Fumés will be slightly sweeter and more fruity than the Sauvignons.

Basically, about any wine name ending in Blanc will have a middle-of-the-road flavor between sweet and dry. This is a good rule to remember, but it's not true in every case.

When you're ready to try the dry stuff, head up to Chardonnay. This is the pinnacle of white wines. I like mine to be desert-dry with lots of flavor.

If you really want to try Chardonnay but think it might be too dry, try a blend. It's the new trend in wine-making to combine Chardonnay with other grapes like Sauvignon and Semillion (semi-on), creating a softer, more gentle wine. Personally, this amounts to heresy in my book. I can't

understand why anyone would want to mess with something so close to perfection in the first place.

Now we come to the reds, my absolute favorite. There are very few sweet red wines, and even fewer good ones. I suggest working up to the dry whites first and becoming comfortable with them before you tackle the reds. Many people can handle dry red wine at the first sip. If you're one of these people, you're lucky.

My advice would be to start with some of the lighter reds, like the Italian table wine Chianti (key-on-tee). It's a mild, tasty way to introduce yourself to red wines. Next, try a glass of Merlot (mare-low). It's a bit heavier, meaning it's generally thicker and has a more pronounced flavor. Merlots are still fairly mild and not excessively dry.

After that, I suggest trying a glass of Pinot Noir (pee-no no-war). This wine is dry, flavorful and spicy and has lots of what wine people call

tannins. Tannin is a weird thing — it's a feeling you get in your mouth, like a bitter numbness, when you drink good red wine. It may sound bad, but it's what most red-wine lovers go gaga over.

King of the tannins is Cabernet Sauvignon (it's like saying cabaret, with an "n" thrown in). This is to the reds what Chardonnay is to white wines. Cabernet Sauvignon is the thickest, driest, most flavorful of the red wines. It may take a year or so to work up to it, but it's worth it.

Like Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignons often are blended with other grapes (usually Merlot) to mellow them out.

Wine tastings are perhaps the best way to learn about the differences in wine, so check those out if you're interested.

Once you begin to like good wine, the only thing that may hold you back is the price.

— John Payne

Murphy

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rather than fully realized songs. The album's closer, "Hit Song," for example, meanders along with no reso-

lution in sight, while Murphy howls about alienation: "Stranger to myself/a stranger till the end."

Nearly 10 years after exiting from Bauhaus, Murphy's vampire image is still intact. He has a certain flair for theatrics (you might say the cathedral

chants at the beginning and end of the album sound like an idea Bowie might have scrapped in the studio).

Aside from "You're So Close," none of the songs are as fully charged as those on "Deep." But for those charting Murphy's long and winding

musical road, or those who just want to rediscover the gloom that was Bauhaus, "Holy Smoke" is among his best works.

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