

Mid-August Lunch

Pranzo di ferragosto

Cert U Italy 2008 76 mins

Crew

Director	Gianni Di Gregorio
Screenplay	Gianni Di Gregorio
Cinematography	Gian Enrico Bianchi
Editor	Marco Spoletini
Art Director	Susanna Cascella
Music	Ratchev & Carratello

Cast

Valeria De Franciscis	Gianni's mother
Marina Cacciotti	Luigi's mother
Maria Cali	Aunt Maria Grazia
Cesarini Sforza	Grazia
Alfonso Santagata	Luigi
Luigi Marchetti	Viking
Biagio Ursitti	Biagio
Petre Rosu	homeless man
Gianni Di Gregorio	Gianni
Marcello Ortolenghi	Doctor friend

Synopsis

Rome, the present. Gianni is an unemployed, middle-aged man who lives with his mother in an old building in Trastevere, a working-class district in the city centre. He spends his time doing the shopping and patiently looking after his gentle but demanding mother. In the middle of the summer season, when most locals are away on holiday, the administrator of the building forces Gianni to give temporary hospitality to his own mother in return for the waiver of unpaid bills. The following day, the administrator turns up with not only his mother, but his mother's sister too, and promptly leaves to take his lover on holiday. The same day, Gianni's family doctor asks a similar favour of him. For the following two days, Gianni cooks and looks after all four old women. At first their different personalities and idiosyncrasies create problems. Gianni's mother doesn't want to share meals with the others; the administrator's mother first flees the house and then gets drunk and tries to seduce Gianni; the doctor's mother constantly refuses to follow her prescribed diet and gorges on whatever she can find in the kitchen. Eventually, the four women become good friends and give Gianni some money so that they can stay together longer.

Sight & Sound, September 2009



Reviews

If you asked the creative team behind *Gomorra* (2008) to make a comedy, the last thing you'd expect them to come up with would be *Mid-August Lunch*. The former was a bleak, despairing look at organised crime in Naples, while the latter is a good-hearted film about the trials — and the consolations — of caring for the elderly. It is a modest little picture, destined for a short theatrical run, but it contains enough warmth and humanity to fill a dozen multiplexes. *Mid-August Lunch* was written and directed by Gianni Di Gregorio, one of several screenwriters on *Gomorra*, who proves his mettle as a film-maker by casting himself in the lead. In the press notes accompanying the film, Di Gregorio gives a typically charming account of how this came about: "I played the leading role because when we were preparing the film, while I was explaining to the crew that we needed to find a middle-aged man, more or less an alcoholic, who had lived for years with his mother, I realised that all eyes were turned to me." Di Gregorio plays Gianni, a dissolute bachelor whose sole occupation is caring for his widowed mother (Valeria De Franciscis). They live in an apartment building and when Gianni cannot pay the service charges the building's administrator offers to waive the fees if he'll look after the administrator's mother for the weekend.

He agrees to this Faustian bargain, only to be wrong-footed when the administrator appears on his doorstep the following day with two octogenarians. Gianni's struggle to present a welcoming face to the old ladies while trying to signal to the double-crossing administrator that this is completely unacceptable makes for a wonderfully comic scene. Di Gregorio's performance throughout is a masterclass in understated clowning.

Gradually, the cramped apartment fills up with elderly women until Gianni is reduced to sleeping on a deck chair on his balcony. But instead of resenting the invasion he warms to his visitors and the film concludes with him and his best friend preparing an elaborate meal for them.

The director of *Gomorra*, Matteo Garrone, served as the producer of *Mid-August Lunch* and, for all their differences, both films share a lack of sentimentality about their subjects. The beauty of this picture is that it doesn't shy away from depicting the indignities of growing old — not the least of which is that none of your children wants to look after you — and yet manages to invest all of its elderly characters with dignity.

Toby Young, The Times, August 2008