

Michael Potemra

NR Literary Editor

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Amy's Whaaat?

A review of *Amy's Orgasm*.

At the risk of losing the reader's interest at the very beginning of this review, I feel constrained to point out that the new film *Amy's Orgasm* is *not, not, not* a porno movie. It is a sweet, charming, funny, and uplifting story about a bright young woman's search for love — and an intellectually provocative analysis of feminism as currently practiced. People who feel that frank and explicit discussions about sex are inappropriate in a movie should certainly avoid this one, but others will be rewarded by a film that's full of honesty and insight.

Amy Mandell (Julie Davis, who also wrote and directed) is the 29-year-old author of a self-help book that seeks to convince women that they don't need men in order to be complete. In doing the talk-show circuit to promote her book, she encounters conservative, male-chauvinist radio shock-jock Matthew Starr (played by Nick Chinlund as a cross between Howard Stern and Rush Limbaugh). After baiting her on his show, Matthew asks her out. Their repartee is realistic: tentative and cute. They end up dating, and the rest of the film is about Amy's struggle to transcend the opinions she espoused in her book.

This is a message movie; it makes the point that taking chances for love is more important than propagating particular political and gender ideologies. The sexist shock jock is actually a very nice guy — surely a first, in American cinema! — and we see Amy struggle with the contradictions: The reality of Matthew as a human being doesn't fit into the pigeonholes of the anti-male brand of feminism. But the film's hilarious high spirits save it from preachiness (except for some bits toward the end).

As Amy's lesbian publicist, Caroline Aaron is very funny and a delight to watch. Another welcome surprise in this movie — and especially so in this very difficult year for Catholic clergy — is a Catholic priest who isn't a villain. The only place Amy — who is Jewish — feels comfortable sharing her doubts and anxieties is the confessional of her neighborhood Catholic church; the priest, played by Jeff Cesario, talks her through her problems.

The only real problem with this movie is its title. As one guy at the screening I attended said: "It's going to end up filed in the wrong place in the video store." That would be a great shame, because this is a delight, one of the best American movies of 2002.

— *By Michael Potemra, NR literary editor*