

Catherine Keener Shines in Nicole Holofcener's Rewarding 'Please Give'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 7, 2010 - 12:37pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Writer/director Nicole Holofcener (“Lovely and Amazing,” “Friends With Money”) has an amazing ability to write characters that immediately feel genuine. It helps to have an actress as free of artifice as Catherine Keener as your regular lead but we shouldn’t diminish Holofcener’s rare ear for dialogue that actually sounds like it wasn’t created by a screenwriting machine.

As she has done before, Holofcener puts lives on display that feel like they could be your neighbors in “Please Give”. They are deeply flawed characters but also immensely relatable. It’s so rare to see dramedies with people who one believes existed before the cameras started rolling and will go on after the credits roll. “Please Give” proves that a film can be a spectacularly rewarding experience by just providing time spent with well-written, believable adult characters.



Please Give

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Kate (Catherine Keener) has started to feel the weight of moral guilt. She makes a living selling the belongings of the recently deceased in her secondhand shop. But she’s not a typical movie vulture. She presents her business as a sort of one-stop-solution for relatives mourning recently lost loved ones. Imagine the time it would take to go through all of your grandmother’s belongings and sell them piece by piece. Kate will take most of the big pieces off your hands for a reasonable price. Of course, she’ll re-sell them for much more.

The guilt over Kate’s unusual business situation is exacerbated a bit by the fact that she and her husband (Oliver Platt) are basically playing

deathwatch with the irascible old lady who lives next door. As most major city dwellers will tell you, the only way to get a bigger apartment is to take your neighbor's. The morally gray life that Kate leads has led to some unusual behavior in her attempts to repent, including basically supporting the homeless tranny who lives in front of her apartment and trying to do volunteer work but getting too emotional to do so.

The woman who lives next door has two daughters - the sweet-and-shy Rebecca (Rebecca Hall) and the cynical-and-slutty Mary (Amanda Peet). Kate's daughter Abby (the excellent Sarah Steele) gets a bit closer to Rebecca while dog-walking while Kate's husband starts an affair with Mary. Meanwhile, Rebecca tries to find love with the grandson (Thomas Ian Nicholas) of one of her patients (Lois Smith). Like a lot of New Yorkers, these people watch their lives intersect for awhile with that of their neighbors and then they come apart again; a little different from the experience but not so much.



Please Give

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Don't go to "Please Give" expecting radical character changes, consequences, or repercussions. It is a slice-of-life dramedy about a world that doesn't often have such things. Yes, there are people out there making money off your parent's death, secretly planning how to extend their bedroom when their neighbor dies, and sleeping around on their wife. And the daring thing about Holofcener's screenplay is that these people aren't villains. They probably live in more of a moral gray area than you or me but they're not the typical cardboard characters of most black-and-white dramas about people who do bad things.

The spectacular cast of "Please Give" seem invigorated by Holofcener's gift for dialogue. Amanda Peet and Oliver Platt deliver their best performances in quite some time and Keener and Hall are typically great. The true find is the young Sarah Steele, an actress to watch as she completely holds her own with more seasoned actresses like Keener and Hall, both of who are typically fantastic.

The final act of "Please Give" somewhat limps to its conclusion more than it needed to but I think part of Holofcener's point is that these characters have moral conundrums that can be easily resolved in a film's running time. It's still a little odd how abruptly Please Give comes to an end and I think there could have a stronger final act that conveyed the same feeling that life goes on. But it's doubtful there could have been more strongly developed, written, or performed characters to give it to you.

'Please Give' stars Catherine Keener, Rebecca Hall, Oliver Platt, Amanda Peet, Lois Smith, Thomas Ian Nicholas, and Sarah Steele. It was written and directed by Nicole Holofcener. It opens on May 7th, 2010. It is rated R.



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