

Life Reveals Itself Through Courses in ‘The Dinner’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 7, 2017 - 9:25pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – There is a peculiar and particular morality in the maneuverings of “The Dinner,” a multi-course meditation on how a tragic incident can split both opinion and family. Everything in the present situation has a below-the-surface past that festers like an unhealed wound, constantly causing pain.

The Dinner of the title is actually a meeting, about a secret that is being held together by the two couples and their children. Throughout the evening, the truth and sources of the secret breaks down, and is stripped away to an essence that is common to all families. The inhumanity contained in the situation is contrasted with the snooty restaurant, where the food is presented and narrated like it’s the last supper before the end of the world. But in a way, this hype is necessary to detach from the stark considerations the two couples face, and this pretentious dining absurdity creates a fake importance around the life-and-death heaviness that the past foundations of the family cannot support. In essence, the film gives everyone a chance to ponder it all, both the characters and the audience.

Paul (Steve Coogan) is dreading attending a dinner with his congressman brother Stan (Richard Gere), along with Paul’s wife Claire (Laura Linney) and Stan’s wife Katelyn (Rebecca Hall). There is an incident that is between the two families, having to do with an incident on a party night between their kids that ends in a tragic circumstance.



Two Couples Meet in 'The Dinner'

Photo credit: *The Orchard*

As the dinner commences, each course is another stage of finding out about the relationships of the brothers, the couples and their families. Paul is particularly having problems with the evening, with his wife Claire acting as negotiator between the siblings. Bit by bit, the truth of the circumstance is revealed, which has repercussions for their careers and lives, which are unraveling during a meal costing over a thousand dollars.

Congressman Stan, played with coiled virtue by Richard Gere, is the founder of the feast, but is constantly being interrupted as his signature law is being voted on in the legislature. The origin of this law is contemporary, and personal to the character, as is revealed during the dinner. This is extraordinary because it truly felt like a last act, the clawing of an ambitious man to the top of the mountain, using his influence on something that had been affecting him since childhood. Also extraordinary is that those affectations are also rooted in the incident being discussed at the meal, from which there seems to be no escape.

The performances are at the highest level, with British comic actor Steve Coogan given the biggest challenge of all the characters, and delivering an acid performance that never wavers – despite having problems with his American accent. Laura Linney takes on the Lady MacBeth role with icy calmness, and acts as someone who possessed a solution all along. Rebecca Hall continues her chameleon-like ability to inhabit characters, creating a look and feel for Katelyn that is revealing just through her body language.



Paul (Steve Coogan) and Claire (Laura Linney) Contemplate the Talk at 'The Dinner'
Photo credit: *The Orchard*

Director and story adapter Owen Moverman, whose resume includes “I’m Not There” and “Love & Mercy” (as writer), in addition to having directed Richard Gere in “Time Out of Mind” (2014), also generates nuance through unique sound and cinema design in “The Dinner.” These tweaks added caustic emphasis on Paul’s free-wheeling narration in the film, which begins to break down as his past is revealed in flashbacks, including a defining visit to the Gettysburg Civil War battlefield memorial.

This is a fundamental and archly felt story, as Paul constantly reminds us of our animal tendencies. Congressman Stan’s civilizing morality may be too late, for despite his present redemption, there is still the flotsam of the family past to negotiate. “The Dinner” had a lot of topics to cover over one meal, but each course is digested with a familiar aftertaste.

“The Dinner” had a nationwide release, including Chicago, on May 5th. See local listings for theaters and showtimes. Featuring Richard Gere, Steve Coogan, Laura Linney, Rebecca Hall, Chloë Sevigny and Charlie Plummer. Screenplay adapted and directed by Owen Moverman. Rated “R”



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