



David Duchovny and Julianne Moore in *Trust the Man*

THE INDISCREET CHARM OF THE PETIT-BOURGEOISIE

Trust the Man

review by George Sax

We haven't confronted romantic and identity problems like the ones besetting the four main characters in *Trust the Man* at least since Woody Allen decamped for London and a late-career concentration on films about upper-echelon Brits unburdened with identity crises. (And he'd given up mining New York-Jewish angst even before that.)

The people in Bart Freundlich's entertaining movie have such problems to spare and express their confused dissatisfaction with self-regardingly verbal skills. Their resemblance to real New Yorkers—the kind most people know, anyway—is often tenuous, but do you really want to shell out money to listen to real life?

The fashionably screwed-up characters in *Trust* certainly can talk, even if they can't quite articulate what's driving them to distraction, mutual and self-alienation, and even adultery.

Even the minor characters are old-fashioned New York Weisenheimers. When Tom (David Duchovny) goes to buy a girlie magazine at the corner newsstand, bearing his infant son on his back, papoose-like, the proprietor hands him the magazine and says, "And some candy for your kid." When Tom thanks him, the guy adds, "A dollar for the candy."

Tom is married to Rebecca (Julianne Moore), a successful movie actress anxiously preparing for her New York stage debut. Tom gave up oppressively empty, soul-staining ad agency employment to tend the two kids and their home. His other major interest, one that's increasingly influencing his psyche and life, is sex, as the magazine purchase indicates. The fact that Rebecca has been declining conjugal relations seems relevant here.

Rebecca's brother Toby (Billy Crudup) has his own preoccupations: death and his 20-odd-year-old Chevy. He spends a lot of time moving the car from space to

space to comply with the city's parking ordinances. Toby needs the car, he tells his skeptical co-habiting lover Elaine (Maggie Gyllenhaal) in case they have to evacuate New York in a hurry during a general crisis. Toby is also disturbed because no one else seems as concerned about mortality as he is.

Trust hasn't been racking up much critical approval as its distribution has expanded across the country. Journalists seem put off by its foursome's narcissistic tomfoolery (the two men, and most especially Toby, are dilwads) and the movie's emphatic insubstantiality. What seems to have been missed is its charm and amusements.

Freundlich shepherds the movie and its protagonists along in an amiably witty fashion. Sure it's superficial and a little smug, and it has a late-inning change of heart and pace that doesn't really come off, but much of it is smart and engaging. The performers make the most of Freundlich's lines and situations. (Has anyone else noticed how much Moore, the director's wife, resembles a younger Susan Sarandon?)

Trust and its creator take the couples' luxurious environs and privileges for granted, and eventually, the characters' problems a little too seriously, but the movie's amused sympathy for them isn't unattractive. (The lack of sociological and moral authenticity in Allen's films didn't evoke a lot of critical skepticism.)

Trust is something like a more frankly vulgar amalgam of Allen and Neil Simon. Eventually, its smart-mouthed griping begins to be replaced by sentimentality and the movie finally relies on some fairly unconvincing screwball stuff, but it's really only jarring if you've taken what preceded this business too seriously.

You could easily spend your entertainment budget more wastefully than to buy an admission to *Trust*.

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