



FILM: **BIG NIGHT**

FDG RATING: 3.9

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Campbell Scott, Stanley Tucci: *directors*

Tony Shalhoub: *actor, Primo*

Stanley Tucci: *actor, Secondo*

DATE: October 18, 2020

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **BIG NIGHT**

Who doesn't enjoy a film where delicious food is featured, especially when artistically prepared and presented? The 1996 film, *Big Night* was ground breaking in its approach. "It was a love affair with food", one discussion participant noted. Another described it as "food porn." Yes, food was a main ingredient for the story about two immigrant brothers from Italy, Chef Primo (Tony Shalhoub), and his younger brother, businessman Secondo (Stanley Tucci) who open their dream restaurant, Paradise, in New Jersey. Secondo is personable, outgoing, while Primo, a brilliant perfectionist chef, is shy, a bit obsessive-compulsive, and chafes when their few customers don't understand, nor appreciate his authentic Italian cuisine, preferring an "Americanized" menu. After Primo labors all day to create a perfect seafood risotto, but a customer complains she cannot find the seafood, then asks for spaghetti and meatballs as a side dish, he shouts, "She's a philistine!" Understandably, the restaurant is struggling; the bank is foreclosing, while the enormously successful Italian restaurant across the street, run by Pascal, gives customers what they want. When Secondo, appeals to him for advice and a loan, Pascal offers to invite the famous Louis Prima and his band to Paradise for dinner, which, of course, will be reported in the newspapers, creating the excellent publicity Paradise needs to attract lots of customers.

Watching the lovingly meticulous preparation of this five star dinner and then seeing each sumptuous dish be beautifully presented and savored is a food lovers heaven. Especially the "creme de la creme" timpano. One guest confesses, "This is the most memorable meal of my life." Sadly, Louis Prima never arrives, leaving the brothers devastated.

Tony Shalhoub and Stanley Tucci are outstanding in their roles as well as other cast members who went on to be just as famous: Secondo's girlfriend Phylis (Minnie Driver), Pascal's mistress, Gabriella (Isabella Rossellini), the flower shop owner, Ann, who Primo has a crush on (Allison Janney). The cast alone is a recipe for an exceptional film and we loved seeing them as they were 20 years ago.

Authentic Italian or Americanized can describe the brothers as well since Primo is attached to his birthplace in Italy and definitely not thrilled about living in the US. Secondo is seduced by flashy cars, beautiful women, the lure of opportunity to be a big success. He feels obligated to take care of his brother. He knows Primo is a genius but having a genius for a brother is a challenge. It's their relationship that we are invested in as the story unfolds. The closeness of siblings is something many discussion participants noted, how they can instinctively know what to do at the moment their sibling is struggling and will provide advice or protection. One memorable scene was after the big night, they were angry and argued, but both accepted their losses, never verbally apologized to each other, rather a supportive slap on the back and sharing food (breakfast) the next morning brought them together again.

Big Night attracted high ratings from almost all discussion participants, relishing a tasty 3.9 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

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