

## East Is East

The blending of cultures in our globalizing world could be said to be the overarching theme of *East is East*, a new motion picture from England, but the big theme takes a necessary back seat to a lively human comedy about family. The film stars Om Puri as George Khan and Linda Bassett as his English wife Ella. The Khans, married a quarter century, run a fish-and-chips shop in Manchester in 1974 with their rambunctious brood of six boys and one girl. The story turns on George, a dutiful Muslim, trying to get his kids to attain good marriages within the faith.

The problem for George is that his kids, typically English in every way but how they look, have no sense of Islam and less respect for its ways (they gobble pork sausages when Dad's away, they're not averse to a pint). The first to be tapped for wedlock, the eldest boy Nazir, runs from the ceremony and is disowned. The two next oldest are then tapped to marry a pair of unalluring sisters from a wealthy--but snobbish--family. Here the prospects are so repulsive that Ella, though fiercely loyal to her George, must put her foot down.

The movie's cross cultural family issues are pertinent and serious, but in the hands of first-time director Damien O'Donnell and scripter Ayub Khan-Din (on whose play the film is based) they are played ever humorously and, often, hilariously. The performances are wonderful, led by the great Om Puri, playing--as he did in last year's *My Son the Fanatic*--a Pakistani at sea in England, but at sea in almost the opposite direction from that earlier film.

The cast of Anglo-Indian kids (a real test for the casting director) is spot on, particularly because--in mere sketches of character and a few lines-- they are so fully realized and neatly individualized. Each has their own short-hand characteristics--one boy is a ladies man, another is the most devout, the youngest is the moody pout--but they come together, and bounce off each other, like a real family. And they display, too, a genuine melding of their mixed heritage. It is perhaps best seen in the lone daughter, highschooler Meenah, (Archie Panjabi), who, though a robust tomboy, is also not averse to a sultry turn in gossamer to Indian strains.

One of England's most successful recent motion pictures, *East Is East* is sharp enough and funny enough to please a wide audience). It will hopefully find enough audience to do business at more than *one* screen in the entire Washington area (when a piece of junk like Jet li's *Romeo Must Die* appears at 20).

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