

Bella Martha / Mostly Martha (2001) Sandra Nettlebeck

AKA *Drei Sterne, Ricette d'amore.*

P Michell, 2012, updated 2022

Synopsis:

Mostly Martha (original German title: *Bella Martha*) is a 2001 German [*romantic comedy drama film*](#) written and directed by [Sandra Nettelbeck](#) and starring [Martina Gedeck](#), [Maxime Foerste](#), and [Sergio Castellitto](#). Filmed in Hamburg, Germany, and Italy, the film is about a workaholic chef who is forced to adjust to major changes in her personal and professional life that are beyond her control. The film won the [Créteil International Women's Film Festival Grand Prix Award](#), and was nominated for the [Goya Award for Best European Film](#) in 2002. It was also nominated for the German Film Awards Outstanding Feature Film.

(Wikipedia)

A lovely well scripted and tightly acted 'small' film. Inspired many remakes. Grossed around ten million US dollars world wide. You will need to have a good meal soon after!

Remade in USA as **No Reservations (2007)** – Scott Hicks) set in Manhattan. Starring Catherine Zeta-Jones & Aaron Eckhart. Screenplay by Carol Fuchs & Sandra Nettleton. A terrific remake by and starring John Favreau – **Chef (2014)** using a similar plot but set on a food truck. The film inspired the Spanish film *Chef's Special*.

Full of humorous lines such as:

Mario:

Why would she want to stay with her family in sunny Italy when she can return to cold and grey Germany to live there with a nut case like you?

On one of her Therapist visits:

Martha Klein:

Then it must be the sugar.

Martha's Therapist:

The sugar?

Martha Klein:

Did you get the Belgian vergeoise like I told you?

Martha's Therapist:

Are you telling me that you can taste what kind of sugar I've used?

Martha Klein:

Of course not, but I can taste which kind you didn't use.

Martha's Therapist:

[she smiles softly as he leaves] I give up. I'll be right back.

(quotes.net)

Creative Personnel

Sandra Nettlebeck – Christin, Director and Writer (11 credits)

Her standout movie.

Cameo as Christin, Martha's sister.

Notable films inc Helen (2009) with Asley Judd and What Doesn't Kill Us (2018).

Interestingly daughter of Uwe Nettlebeck connection with KrautRock band Faust as well as being a film critic. In his obituary reference is made to his ... cooking.

"Food is a great passion of mine, and I think it is one of the best visual and most sensual metaphors life has to offer." (amazon.com)

Martina Gedeck – Martha (136 credits)

Prolific actress. Gedeck has won a total of 23 major cinema and TV awards. She was nominated as Europe's best actress on her role in "Mostly Martha"

Appeared in some interesting films: Badder Meinhof Complex (2009) and Good Shepherd (2006), Lives of Others (2006) [dir Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck who made 'The Tourist' a remake of 'Anthony Zimmer'].

"My audience doesn't want to know how many eggs I fry in the morning. I speak through my characters."

Servio Castelletto – Mario. Actor, writer, director. (98 credits)

Variety of work inc Chroncles of Narnia (2008), Paris Je t'aime (2006). Just finished Dante (2022) – playing Boccaccio. Directed and starred in A Bookshop of Paris (2021)

Cuisine Flicks

Others include more recent:

Kings of Pastry, Vatel, Mid-August Lunch, Julie & Julia, Babbete's Feast, Delicatessen, Chocolat, Eat Drink Man Woman, Soul Food, Tortilla Soup, Woman on Top, Ratatouille [cartoon], Tampopo, Big Night (1996), Waitress, Like Water for Chocolate, ... and many others ...

Some clips can be seen here – 10 Best Food Movies:

<http://atthepass.wordpress.com/2010/01/24/10-best-food-movies/>

(sourced 20 May 2012)

Trivia:

Sergio's German voice was dubbed.

Filmed in Hamburg and Italy.

Occasionally includes the recipes.

Critical response

In his review in *The New York Times*, film critic Elvis Mitchell wrote, "The movie itself has a trim, ticking precision, though Manfred Eicher (one of the founders of the ECM jazz label) adds a score that gives the picture a light-handed rhythm. Ms. Nettelbeck seems to have achieved a balance of control and autonomy so that *Mostly Martha* doesn't feel as if it was directed by its central figure. The final confection is extremely enjoyable, though a few degrees shy of perfection."

In their review in *Spirituality & Practice*, Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat wrote, "Writer and director Sandra Nettelbeck beautifully orchestrates the transformation of the chilly, neurotic, and self-absorbed Martha as her heart begins to open under the tutelage of Lina and Mario."

In his review in *Reel Views*, James Berardinelli wrote, "The acting is top-notch. Martina Gedeck is glorious as Martha. ... As Lina, Maxime Foerste gives a natural, unforced performance. ... And Sergio Castellitto is delightful as Mario. ... As much as any other motion picture that employs the preparation and consumption of food as a key element, *Mostly Martha* provides the perfect blend of cinematic nourishment and gratification."
(Wikipedia)

Reviews

DVD Direct -

Gedeck's Martha manages to shock us with her eccentric interpersonal dynamic while simultaneously charming us. The breadth and depth of her portrayal is reason enough to watch **Mostly Martha**. She summons fire, chill, warmth, coolness, irony, and poignancy with equal grace. What if I told you she throws raw meat on the table, slaps a little girl, and makes a pregnant woman slave over a hot stove, but you love her anyway? The story is told in such a way that you root for her idiosyncrasies to triumph, even the unhealthy ones.

Gedeck's sublime acting is equaled in the visual language of the film. Compositions and sets are milked for symbolic potential. Whenever Lina (Martha's eight-year-old albatross) rides in the car, she hops in the back seat and crosses her arms. This small act of defiance works on a literal level, establishing the stubborn conflict between the two. It also works on a visual level, suggesting emotional distance. Another symbol is the freezer in Martha's kitchen. The kitchen itself is light, warm, frenetic, and stressful. Whenever the pressures threaten Martha, she retreats to the solitude of the freezer. Visually, the cool palette of the freezer is a sharp contrast to the stressful, warm humanity of the kitchen. Symbolically, the freezer is a telling comment on Martha's emotional state.

Martina Gedeck is not the only standout in **Mostly Martha**. Sergio Castellitto portrays

Mario with such zest that you are uplifted when he is onscreen. His persistence, charm, and love for life brighten the precise drudgery of Martha's kitchen. Maxime Foerste could easily have lapsed into sullen brattiness in her portrayal of Lina. But like Gedeck, we love her in spite of her unflattering actions.

This one carries the label of romantic comedy, and why not? It has some romance, and fine comedy. The comedy mostly stems from Martha's subtle brutality with people. That poor therapist. Those poor customers. The same edge powers the tragedy, where Martha pushes away intimacy through her awkward interpersonal approach.

Sandra Nettelbeck wrote and directed this gem, which is more impressive given it is her film debut. The direction is superb and the story perfectly paced. She uses clichés to her advantage, hinting at them to introduce tension but ultimately ignoring them in favor of real behavior. This stark realism fades away so subtly that the warm fuzzies don't feel tacked on. Martha relents and warmth creeps into the film.

Sourced - <http://www.dvdverdict.com/reviews/mostlymartha.php>