

Perfect Strangers / Perfetti sconosciuti (2016) Genovese

P Michell, 2020

Part of 'The Italian Film Collection' on SBS OnDemand.

SYNOPSIS

On the evening of a total eclipse of the moon, seven close friends gather for a dinner party. Early in the meal, one of the friends, a relationship therapist named Eva, says that she is convinced that many couples would separate if they saw the messages on each others' phones. As the friends debate this contention, they agree - some of them reluctantly - to play a game. They will each place their phone on the table and they will share their messages and calls with the rest of the group.

Director: Paolo Genovese

Cast: Giuseppe Battiston, Anna Foglietta, Marco Giallini, Edoardo Leo, Valerio Mastandrea, Alba Rohrwacher, Kasia Smutniak

Duration: 96mins

The 'Dinner Party' has become quite a trope for movies. Bunuel's *Exterminating Angel* (1962) about the guests 'trapped'. Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986) begins and ends with two dinner parties a year apart.

Perfect Strangers takes the Allen approach to a new level. Concentrating on people's dalliances, alleged and real. Despite mostly filmed in one room, the film's success hinges on ensemble acting, great script (takes a couple of viewings to get all subtleties). Note how the subject of gayness is firstly introduced then expanded.

The ending (after leaving the party) is ... 'interesting' ...

NOTABLE SCRIPT BITS:

Whilst the script is credited to a number of people - suspect that Genovese and Bologna are the major contributors.

Here's some tidbits -

Rocco: *Not to turn every argument into a fight for supremacy. I don't believe it's weak to be the one to give in. In fact, I think it's wise. The only couples I see who last are those where one of the two manages to take a step back, but is really a step ahead.*

Keep an ear out for ... Ken and Barbie ... Mac vs PC

Definition of love:

Peppe: Eva, how do you know if you're in love?

Eva: Why are you asking me?

Peppe: You study these things.

Bianca: I'll tell you. If you talk to her for 30 minutes a day, you're in love.

Peppe: What if I talk for 60 minutes?

Carlotta: Then you're madly in love.

Lele: Then you stop talking, which means you're married!

CREATIVE TALENT

Paolo Genovese – Director / Story / Script (20 credits)

Interview here:

<http://www.iitaly.org/magazine/focus/art-culture/article/secrets-perfect-strangers-interview-paolo-genovese>

The eclipse is simply a metaphorical situation. I used it to give the film tempo. The film is about the unsaid, and the eclipse, just like the characters, hides something else. Secrets are what we cover up, keep hidden from our life, during a lunar eclipse the Earth's shadow hides the Moon from view. I thought it was an interesting metaphor.

Filippo Bologna – Co-Scriptwriter (25 credits)

Script for *Se son rose* (2018) looks interesting. Seems to be interested in fixed locales with people ‘trapped with their technology’. Such as *Cos fai a Capadanno* (2018) which he directed as well. [I have not seen either of these.]

Born in Tuscany in 1978 and lives in Rome where he works as a writer and screenwriter. His novels *The Parrots* and *How I Lost the War* are also published by Pushkin Press.

Trivia – Pushkin Press may be best known for reintroducing Stefan Zweig to the English speaking world. Zweig, the psychological melodramatist. [His ‘Letter from an Unknown Woman’ is scheduled this year.]

TRIVIA

The film was a critical and commercial success, winning the [David di Donatello](#) in the Best Film Category and grossing more than €16 million in Italy. It has been remade in many countries including Spain (as [Perfectos desconocidos](#)), Mexico, South Korea (as [Intimate Strangers](#)), France, Hungary, Greece, China, Russia, Armenia, Germany, Poland, Vietnam, and Turkey. There’s another version in current production 2021.

REVIEWS

Wikipedia.

WINNER – 2016 ITALIAN ACADEMY AWARDS – BEST FILM, BEST SCREENPLAY

WINNER – 2016 TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL – BEST SCREENPLAY

The multi award-winning new comedy of manners from Paolo Genovese is a fiendishly clever take on decorum in the age of modern technology, and poses the question: how well do we *really* know those close to us?

The titular perfect strangers are actually seven long-time friends (three couples and one bachelor), all 40ish, who gather one night for a dinner party and agree that no private calls or messaging will disrupt their evening. Instead, in a communal fit of ‘we have nothing to hide’ bravado, they place their devices on the table, and all incoming calls and texts are shared with the group. (Letting a caller know they’re on speaker is considered a cheat). But what seems at first like an innocent and playful distraction between friends quickly turns into something

more, as the messages start to reveal some eye-opening secrets and how little they may truly know about the partners and acquaintances opposite.

Fairly bristling with of-the-moment talking points about the wonders and complications of modern technology, PERFECT STRANGERS became a box office sensation in Italy. Thanks to its superb, rapid-fire dialogue and terrific ensemble cast, including Marco Giallini (*God Willing*) and Alba Rohrwacher (*I Am Love*), the film effortlessly transitions between incisive comedy and emotion, delivering a fresh and wildly entertaining spin on the many ways performance has come to define our public lives.

Funny games

[nmeagahey](#) 22 December 2017

Depending on how you look at it the idea behind Perfetti Sconosciuti (Perfect Strangers) could be seen as quite ambitious or an absolute nightmare. Almost the entire film takes place in a single location in an apartment, where a small group of friends have gathered for a dinner party. Over the course of the evening - for the next hour and a half of the film - we and their friends gradually find out what little secrets each of them keep. No-one's life is going to be the same again.

It starts out as a little experiment, a game, and it doesn't sound terribly promising.. Three couples and one single friend - whose new girlfriend wasn't well enough to attend - sit down to dinner and the banal conversation inevitably turns around to discussing the differences between about men and women. Men are like PCs apparently and women are Macs. A point of contention however is established over the situation of one of their friends who is going through a divorce; his wife having discovered he was having an affair with a 22 year old. "How many couples would split up if they looked at each other's phones", they wonder. Well, let's play a game then...

They all agree to leave their phones on the table, and any message, text or call that arrives during the evening must be shared with everyone. Surely everyone will agree to this, unless they have something to hide. Well, there's little doubt that secrets will be revealed and attempted to be explained, but the question is who will be found out? All of them? And how bad will it be? What soon becomes apparent is that the evening is not going to end well, and any hope of damage limitation vanishes as the evening gradually descends into anger, recrimination and complete havoc.

It's not just the subject that is divisive here, but the manner in which the film handles this potentially vicious game is also a tough one to call. Paolo Genovese is not Michael Haneke, so no-one is going to be responsible for the genocide of a colonial nation or crimes against humanity, but the director's take on the romantic-comedy with a touch of philosophising in films like *Tutta colpa di Freud* (Blame Freud) doesn't inspire confidence that Genovese is capable of revealing any real insights on relationships, particularly though such a contrived situation.

If it was an out-an-out comedy - or even just a little funnier - you might find Perfetti Sconosciuti an amusing distraction with some interesting observations, but Genovese tries to make it into an "issue" film and moralise a little, and there he's on less secure ground. Having said that, there's much to enjoy in the situation and performances - the film winning David di Donatello awards for Best Director and Best Screenplay awards in 2016 - and once on-board,

you'll want to see this through to its inevitably catastrophic conclusion. Inevitably? Well, twists abound, which is another divisive tactic and a sign perhaps on lack of commitment, but when the film makes its point either way, it's hard to feel cheated.