

Sex, Guilt, and Revenge Are All on the Menu

The Song of Lunch

Starring Emma Thompson and Alan Rickman

On MASTERPIECE CONTEMPORARY

Sunday, November 13, 2011 at 9pm ET on PBS

What could possibly go wrong when two ex-lovers meet for lunch at their favorite haunt from years before? Lots. Emma Thompson (*Sense and Sensibility*) and Alan Rickman (*Harry Potter*) take that risk in this funny, bittersweet drama, adapted from Christopher Reid's captivating narrative poem, on *The Song of Lunch*, airing Sunday, November 13, 2011 at 9pm ET on PBS (check local listings).

During its recent UK broadcast, *The Song of Lunch* delighted critics, with *The Guardian* (London) calling it "quietly moving, clever, beautiful, sad, and true. Just wonderful." *The Times* (London) was also charmed: "It is as accomplished as anything you are ever likely to watch—rich and dense and minutely observed, accurate and unusual and superbly performed."

Recalling their role as a beleaguered married couple in the 2003 romantic comedy *Love Actually*, Thompson and Rickman return as star-crossed lovers, this time with a backstory of heartbreak and recriminations—at least for one of them.

Rickman's character (neither is named) instigates the mid-day rendezvous. He is a morose, middle-aged copyeditor with a book publisher in London. Fifteen years earlier, Thompson's outgoing character left him for a wildly successful author, and she now lives a happily-married family life in Paris.

Over glasses of Chianti and grappa (mostly imbibed by him), the complexities of their relationship emerge. An aspiring poet, he wrote a single disastrous book that is an epic retelling of their romance. In it, he plays the role of the legendary Greek poet Orpheus, while she is Orpheus's doomed lover, Eurydice. It's an allegory that can be easily misunderstood, especially with the poem's theme of failed rescue of the heroine from the underworld.

However, she knows him too well to be offended. And besides, it's all water under the bridge. Plus there is so much to talk about! And talk they do, for a surprising, provocative, and sometimes agitating lunch-hour, amid the food and bustle of a trendy Soho restaurant called Zanzotti's, which is less rollicking than they remember from the old days. Fittingly, their date ends on a mythic note.

Award-winning poet Christopher Reid says that *The Song of Lunch* was inspired by the famous pub scene in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (chapter 12), which captures a slice of life in Dublin from the early 1900s—just as Reid's poem summons a now-vanished Soho, remembered boozily through a grappa glass of nostalgia.

Below is a delectable excerpt from the poem, evoking Zanzotti's and its proprietor in the heyday of the now-faded romance:

*Zanzotti's: unreformed Soho Italian.
Chianti-in-a-basket.
Breadsticks you snap
with a sneeze of dust.
Red gingham cloths overlaid
on the diagonal
with plain green paper ones.
Finger smears at the neck
of the water carafe.
And Massimo himself
touring the tables
with his fake bonhomie.*

The Song of Lunch is a BBC/MASTERPIECE Co-Production, based on the poem by Christopher Reid. The director is Niall MacCormick. The producer is Pier Wilkie. The executive producers are Sarah Brown, Greg Wise and Rebecca Eaton.

MASTERPIECE on PBS is presented by WGBH Boston. Rebecca Eaton is executive producer. Funding for the series is provided by public television viewers with additional support from contributors to The MASTERPIECE Trust, created to help ensure the series' future.

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