

Max Rose (2016)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 23 min.

Our content ratings: Violence 1; Language 5; Sex/Nudity 2.

Our star rating (1-5): 4.5

*I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
My eyes waste away because of grief;
they grow weak because of all my foes.*

Psalm 6:6-7

Writer/ director Daniel Noah's film is a good character study of an elderly man overcome by grief and refusing to be consoled by either his son or granddaughter. Jerry Lewis is superb as the 87-year-old old former jazz pianist whose grief over the loss of Eva (Claire Bloom), his beloved wife of 65 years is so overwhelming that he gives up on life. Then he learns something that motivates him to act because it is so disturbing that he thinks that his marriage had been a sham—this despite the flashbacks to the pair that suggest otherwise.

The discovery follows weeks of Max's estranged son Chris (Kevin Pollak) and loving granddaughter Annie (Kerry Bishé) trying to comfort him and help him to move on in life. He rejects every and anything that either of them suggest, his words especially to Chris tinged with hostility. Unable to care for himself, he enters an assisted living facility. The attendants try to get him interested in crafts and other activities, but they all seem meaningless to him. The counselor Jenny Flowers (Illeana Douglas) also is unable to stir him. He does enjoy an evening with a couple of other old

musicians (this is a magical scene!), but his joyful mood evaporates with the rise of the sun the next day.

Then, while sorting through a box of Eva's belongings he comes across a locket she has kept. The inscription on it, with the same date on which he had recorded his first song, suggests that she was in love with someone else all those years. He sets out to track the man down. What he finds is the bed-ridden Ben Tracey (Dean Stockwell), an old man in the terminal stages of emphysema—and from him a measure of wisdom, relief, and the awareness that life is too precious to spend it in grief or regret. The masterfully staged scene between the two rivals will remain in your memory for a long time.

With its excellent cast, headed by a talented actor better remembered as a comedian, Daniel Noah offers one more reminder that we not require young and attractive characters to make for a compelling film. At Cannes in 2013 critics dismissed the film as a muddled mess, but now, recut, it is easily comprehensible, demonstrating the need for truth and the support of others to make life worth living.

This review with a set of questions will be in the Nov. 2016 issue of VP.