



Kitchen comedy leaves a sweet taste

FESTIVAL FILM

Eden (MA15+)

★★★★

Charlotte Roche, Josef Ostendorf

Directed by Michael Hofmann

Review: Ron Banks

Never has the transformative power of food been so powerfully suggested as in this highly entertaining and off-beat German film.

Not even Mostly Martha, Dinner Rush or Eat Drink Man Woman, which have been offered as comparison films, can really hold a soup ladle to this delicious concoction of creative possibilities in the kitchen and the ability of top-class chefs to transform lives.

The chef in question in this engagingly different comedy is Gregor, a moody, eccentric and vastly overweight genius who runs a tiny restaurant in a Bavarian spa town. He can charge 300 euros (\$485) for a single meal, such is his renown. But when the rather introverted chef meets waitress Eden after saving her daughter from drowning in the local park, he takes gruff pleasure in cooking after-hours for this sweet-faced and gentle young mother.

Eden becomes so fond of Gregor's private meals that she quickly learns an important lesson: fine food, exquisitely cooked and presented, leads to a state of wellbeing far beyond the possibilities of ordinary home-cooked food. Her state of happiness is translated into more successful love-making with her husband, Xaver, who works as a dance and swimming instructor at the town's spa and entertainment complex.

Xaver should be grateful for the way



Delicious: Charlotte Roche in a tender moment in Eden.

Gregor's cooking has transformed his sex life but he is jealous of this fat cook, who seems to be spending too much time with his wife.

It takes some time, however, for the film to reach this state of conflict. Much of it is taken up with the growing platonic friendship between the cook and the waitress as Gregor whips up his "experiments" in the kitchen with the kind of subtlety and daring known only to a few top chefs.

Gregor strips and dresses whole carcasses, conjures up subtle spices, tastes them, even rubs them around his mouth and cheeks in an occasional orgiastic ritual that suggests that preparing food has its own magic secrets and seductions.

After the frenzy of creativity he then presents them in silence to the expectant

waitress, who takes her own gentle delight in these delicious tastes.

It is tempting to call Eden a romantic comedy, but it is really a tale of growing friendship between two people who learn to value the worth of each other.

Unfortunately, their platonic ideals are shattered by the brutal confrontations of Xaver, who bullies his wife and then turns hostile towards Gregor, threatening his livelihood as a restaurateur by an act of wanton destruction. In the end, though, retribution comes to Xaver in a scene in the forest that is as surprising as it is funny — in a slightly macabre way.

Eden is a refreshingly original film, despite the somewhat familiar format of the genius chef with the power to charm women. Its originality is due largely to the wonderful performance of the over-sized Josef Ostendorf as Gregor. He convincingly conveys a gentle, complex man who loves food but has missed out on love himself. His wistful looks, abrupt mood changes and air of loneliness suggest a man more likely to be misunderstood than embraced by the world.

The quiet, gentle demeanour of Charlotte Roche as Eden is delightful in portraying a woman who finds herself gradually transformed by her meetings with the sometimes distant chef.

It's the perfect Festival outdoor film, provided your picnic does not include spam sandwiches. Truffles is the only perfect complement to this gastronomic tale.

Eden is at the Somerville Auditorium until Sunday. It then moves to the Joondalup Pines.