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## ✓ Gianni e le donne (The Salt of Life) (12A)

Director: **Gianni Di Gregorio**

Italy 2011 In Italian with English subtitles

Running time : 90 minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Gianni Di Gregorio** (Gianni), **Valeria De Franciscis** (la madre di Gianni), **Alfonso Santagata** (Alfonso), **Elisabetta Piccolomini** (la moglie di Gianni), **Valeria Cavalli** (Valeria).

SCRIPT: **Gianni Di Gregorio, Valerio Attanasio**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Gian Enrico Bianchi**. EDITING: **Marco Spoletini**. MUSIC: **Ratchev & Carratello**.

Some of you may have caught a 'small' Italian film a few years ago, entitled *Mid-August Lunch*. It charted the efforts of a middle-aged bachelor to look after his elderly mother and manage his debts, the latter of which entailed taking in his landlord's mother for a time, and that was just the beginning. Well, this unlikely story of demanding dowagers and apron-wearing servant hero proved a signal success at festivals and arthouses, winning at London and Venice amongst others.

So it might come as small surprise that, having struggled to finance his first film, Di Gregorio suddenly found money available to make a second. In it he again more or less plays himself, and De Franciscis plays his mother. Even Santagata makes another appearance as his lawyer friend, having been the landlord in the previous film. But *Gianni e le donne* is altogether a more assured piece of work.

Gianni, for actors keep their real names in this most relaxed and familiar of film-making stables, lives with his wife and daughter in a Rome apartment. He has just retired and was perhaps looking forward to a life of leisure, reading the paper and sharing a drink with his cronies on the street outside a nearby café, watching the girls amble past. However, this is not to be, for each morning he receives his parcel of errands from his wife, with whom relations are cordial if almost filial, and when he has finished with those he must attend to the persistent demands of his mother, who lives at some distance and usually wants him to take her temperature, or uncork a bottle of wine for her friends.

Gianni also devotes some attention to his downstairs neighbour, Valeria, offering to walk

her none too small dog along with his own and purchase the odd grocery item for her. This may have something to do with the fact that Valeria is extremely easy on the eye, liberal with her neighbourly kisses and possessed of that singular air of purity, sincerity and availability that make Italian girls so intoxicating a result of clashing sociological phenomena: Catholicism and modernism. Anyway, Valeria remains a friend to Gianni and nothing more, but she is one of a number of females with whom, in the course of the film, the viewer can see all too clearly that Gianni is exercising the thought, 'what if?'

After all, everyone else seems to be getting it: his acquaintances outside the bar, true men of leisure, his lawyer friend, with whom he attempts a disastrous double date with a pair of absurdly attractive sisters, and of course the youngsters partying round Valeria's, who inhabit a world so different to Gianni's that he feels that sense of disorientation and helplessness of a man in a foreign country who does not speak the same language.

All this is done with a lightness of touch that avoids prurience or embarrassment and has us empathising with Gianni, even if we are not at his stage of life yet, while at the same time enjoying the self-debunking irony of his failure to make contact with the life-giving force he seeks. As its closing fantasy montage makes clear, here is a film which delights and takes comfort in cinema's capacity to indulge us, even if it means lying to us!

**David Clare**