

Two New Films Celebrating Moms Premiere Just in Time for Mother's Day

By Sandi Sonnenfeld

As the daughter of a woman who raised seven children, I can tell you that the last thing most moms want to do on Mother's Day is celebrate it at home with the kids. One surefire gift: treat the favorite mother in your life to a sumptuous Sunday brunch at the most elegant restaurant in town followed by a late afternoon movie. Luckily, Hollywood is releasing not one, but two, films celebrating all things Mom—at least white and upper middle-class moms—just in time for her special day.

Premiering in theaters on April 29th, [*Mother's Day*](#), starring Julia Roberts, Jennifer Aniston, Kate Hudson and Jason Sudeikis, focuses on three generations of a family who come together to celebrate Mother's Day weekend. Plugged as a big-hearted comedy, the film is directed by Garry Marshall and the third in his recent series of ensemble holiday movies (2010's *Valentine's Day* and 2011's *New Year's Eve*). That Marshall's *Pretty Woman* catapulted Roberts into film stardom more than 25 years ago may explain why the talented Oscar-winner still agrees to appear in this director's utterly predictable, eminently forgettable, but generally enjoyable, movies.

On May 6, Screen Media Films releases [*Mothers & Daughters*](#), an indie drama starring a who's who of female power actors, including Courteney Cox, Christina Ricci, Susan Sarandon, Mira Sorvino, and Sharon Stone. *Mothers & Daughters* centers around single rock photographer Rigby Gray (played by Eva Amurri Martino, the real-life daughter of Susan Sarandon), who's riding a career high when an unlikely and unexpected pregnancy forces her to turn her lens inward. As Rigby slowly comes to terms with what it might mean to change her life forever, she

re-discovers, through a series of photographs documenting motherhood in all its varieties, her own relationship with her estranged mother. Written by Paige Cameron and Paul Duddridge and directed by Duddridge and Nigel Levy.

Mother's Day Films for the Rest of Us (*sidebar*)

If you just can't bear the thought of another Mother's Day watching lachrymose movies like *Stepmom*, *Beaches* or *Steel Magnolias*, check out these award-winners which also explore the bond between mother and child, but thankfully, contain no artificial sweeteners. Not only will the favorite woman in your life appreciate these refreshing alternatives, each has been husband-tested to guarantee that male viewers in your party won't run out of the room in chick flick horror.

Mildred Pierce (1945), Unrated

No mother on screen sacrifices more for her children than the film noir heroine Mildred Pierce. Joan Crawford gives an Academy Award-winning performance as the towering, glowering, silently suffering Mildred, who after her husband abandons her, rises from waitress to restaurant-chain owner. Ann Blyth plays the spoiled, class-conscious, manipulative daughter Veda with wild abandon. Skip HBO's 2014 remake and watch it in glorious, moody black and white—you will be engrossed in this dark tale of love, betrayal and murder. With Jack Carson, Zachary Scott and the always funny Eve Arden. Directed by Michael Curtiz and written by Ranald MacDougall and James M. Cain, from Cain's novel.

Secrets & Lies (1996), R

Hortense, a successful black ophthalmologist (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), discovers that her birth mother Cynthia (Brenda Blethyn) is a lower-class white woman, but the woman denies it. As emotions run high, everyone's secrets are exposed. Blethyn won an Golden Globe Award for her portrayal of Cynthia, the confused, shocked and afraid 40-something-year-old mother who finds it difficult not only to come to term with her past, but how to negotiate her present, including what to tell her grown up son and daughter-in-law about who Hortense is. The darling of the 1996 Cannes Film Festival, *Secrets & Lies* was nominated for five Academy Awards. Written and directed by Mike Leigh.

Mother (1996), PG

As he finalizes his second divorce, successful science fiction writer John Henderson (Albert Brooks) decides to move back home with his mother (played by Oscar-winner and 1950s mega star Debbie Reynolds) to discover why his relationships with women fail. In a rare late-stage career film appearance, Reynolds plays the lovingly frustrating, seemingly oblivious, largely contented comic foil to Brooks' witty and neurotically depressed protagonist, creating a light but deliciously satisfying treat. Brooks (*Broadcast News*, *Defending Your Life*; *Finding Nemo*), who also directed and co-wrote the screenplay with Monica Johnson remains one of the most underrated players in Hollywood, and is one of the funniest. Also starring Rob Morrow and Lisa Kudrow. Awards include the New York Film Critics Circle Award and the National Society of Film Critics Award for Best Screenplay.

Real Women Have Curves (2002), PG-13

Before her popular successes as star of *Superstore* and *Ugly Betty*, America Ferrara played Ana Garcia, a gifted first-generation Mexican-American who dreams of attending Columbia University as a way out of the barrios of L.A. Ana's biggest obstacle is neither racism nor poverty; it's her devoted, but chronically disapproving mother. This small, sweet, but wholly unsentimental film offers a refreshing take on the typical coming of age story with true insights into the Latino working class striving to make it in America. Directed by Patricia Cardoso, for which she was named the Sundance Film Festival Audience Award Winner, the movie also won the 2002 Humanitas Prize for the screenwriters Josefina Lopez and George LaVoo.

Suffragette (2015), PG-13

Written, produced and directed by an all-female team, this lovely, heartbreaking film explores the women's suffrage movement in post-WWI Great Britain, a time when even the children married women bore were the property of their husbands. Galvanized by political activist Emmeline Pankhurst (Meryl Streep), working wife and mother Maud Watts (Carey Mulligan) joins a diverse group of women who fight for equality and the right to vote. Faced with increasing police action, Maud and the other dedicated suffragettes play a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse, risking their jobs, homes, families and lives. Anne-Marie Duff, Helena Bonham Carter and Romola Garai also star. Shamefully overlooked by film audiences, the Oscars and other major US and UK film awards, *Suffragette* won eight awards from the Women Film Critics Circle, including the Courage in Filmmaking Award for director Sarah Gavron and Best Images of Women Award. Written by Abi Morgan.