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## LUMINARIAS



“Luminarias” is a romantic comedy focusing on four Latina women looking for love in Los Angeles. “Luminarias” is also the name of their favorite eastside club and a great place to meet single muchachos. When Andrea, Irene, Sofia and Lilly meet the talk always turns to their troubles with men. The story focuses on Andrea, a successful attorney who is newly divorced and not quite ready for a relationship. Even though Andrea doesn’t like White guys, she goes on a blind date with a Jewish lawyer played by Scott Bakula who ends up charming her.

We follow each woman’s search for love and struggles with prejudice in a city as racially diverse as Los Angeles. The film includes a solid cast that includes Evelina Fernandez, Robert Beltrane who plays Chakotay on Star Trek Voyager and my old favorite, Cheech Marin. Love that guy! This is a fresh romantic comedy with a lot of heart that takes chances by discussing everything from interracial dating, to Latino self-hate to white men’s penises. Luminarias is a perfect film for middle-aged, single Latina women living in Los Angeles. So, clearly, “Luminarias” is not for me, and in spite of that, I found it really funny, smart and sweet. I enjoyed it.

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## Luminarias (review)

Fri Oct 06 2000, 03:37am | Comments Off



Based on Evelina Fernández’s hit stage play, *Luminarias* is most notable for the characters playing out its sometimes sitcomish plot: professional Latina women. Sick of being cast as a maid or mother of a gangbanger, Fernández, along with director Jose Luis Valenzuela (her husband) and actor/producer Sal Lopez, raised the \$1 million budget from California’s Latino community — Fernández wasn’t the only one tired of Hollywood stereotypes. Complex and well-rounded, her women are an engaging bunch to spend some time with as they gather at Luminarias, their favorite nightspot, to talk about love, life, and the difficulties of social navigation in a city as racially diverse as Los Angeles. Call it *Sex in the City of Angels*. Lawyer Andrea (Fernández) is divorcing cheating Joe (Robert Beltran: [Trekies](#)) and unexpectedly falling for a Jewish colleague, Joseph (Scott Bakula: [American Beauty](#)), forcing her to confront her racism toward whites. Therapist Sofia (Marta DuBois) dates only whites, but suddenly finds herself in an affair with Pablo (Lopez), who barely speaks English, forcing her to confront her anxiety about her own culture. Designer Irene’s (Dyana Ortelli) plan to give up sex for Lent is proving more difficult than she thought. And artist Lilly (Ángela Moya), never romantically stable, settles down at last which rattles his parents. There may be 2 new pageviews left

rew C. Lim),  
nfidelity,

domestic violence, racism, sexism, cultural identity, *and* love and sex are a lot of ground to cover in a single film, and *Luminarias* too often relies on coincidence and cliché to keep things moving. And yet it's wonderful to see adult women — of any ethnicity — portrayed so positively onscreen.

**MPAA:** rated R for language and sexuality

*viewed at a private screening with an audience of critics*

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# Luminarias

*Rated R, 98 min. Directed by Jose Luis Valenzuela. Starring Cheech Marin, Robert Beltran, Lupe Ontiveros, Dyana Ortelli, Angela Moya, Marta Dubois, Scott Bakula, Evelina Fernandez.*

REVIEWED BY HOLLIS CHACONA, FRI., JULY 14, 2000

Watching *Luminarias* is like going to a really great party. With wonderful music, interesting characters, and lots of laughter, this picture feels much bigger than it really is. Noisy and colorful and warm and funny, it's the story of four Latina friends who are struggling with love, sex, divorce, success, and a lifetime of anger and resentment from growing up brown in a white world. Rage is acknowledged and expressed, but love and acceptance are palpable and overpowering. Solid performances (Marin is especially unforgettable as the irascible but sagacious uncle), arresting art direction (two words: blue truck), and outrageous costuming (Irene's way-over-the-top miniature sombrero couture is absolutely worth the price of admission) bring this vivid and voluptuous mural to life. There are some unlikely plot developments and an often uneasy mix of social commentary and melodrama, but its very imperfections seem to work for the picture. A big, living, breathing film with a loud and steady heartbeat, *Luminarias* wouldn't be nearly as human or as much fun if it were perfect. That perfection would seem an artifice masking the story's human touch. *[reprinted from SXSWS Film reviews, 3/22/99]*

★★★★★

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Luminarias, Jose Luis Valenzuela, Cheech Marin, Robert Beltran, Lupe Ontiveros, Dyana Ortelli, Angela Moya, Marta Dubois, Scott Bakula, Evelina Fernandez

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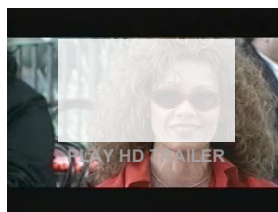
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liked it  
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Billed as a Latina *Waiting to Exhale*, this film details the life and loves of four Hispanic women: Sofia, a therapist; Andrea, a divorced lawyer; Irene, a flashy clothes designer; and Lilly, an artist. The women gather every week at the nightclub *Luminarias* to discuss jobs, family, love, and sex. Sofia, who dates white men in the hope of fitting into Anglo culture, becomes smitten with an amorous Mexican waiter. On the other hand, Andrea, who believes that white guys are only interested in Hispanic woman as exotic love toys, finds herself falling for a Jewish lawyer. While Lilly deals with racism from her Korean-American boyfriend's family, sexpot Irene has her own conflicted feelings toward her transvestite brother. *Luminarias* was screened at the 1999 San Sebastian Film Festival. ~ Jonathan Crow, Rovi

R, 1 hr. 41 min.

In Theaters: May 3, 2000 Wide

Drama, Romance, Comedy

On DVD: Feb 26, 2002

Directed By: José Luis Valenzuela

MTI Home Video

Written By: Evelina Fernandez

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### Cast



Evelina Fernandez  
Andrea



Scott Bakula  
Joseph



Marta Du Bois  
Sofia



Angela Moya  
Lilly



Dyana Ortelli  
Irene



Seidy Lopez  
Cindy

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## LUMINARIAS

**Luminarias** is being billed as a Latina *Waiting to Exhale* and, considering the utter lack of films featuring Latina characters, the idea is commendable. But the movie is so concerned with being groundbreaking that it forgets to actually be a good movie. One of the first scenes in the film has 4 Latina women sitting in Luminarias, their favorite bar, talking about how all white guys are jerks, not to mention sexually impotent. If this were white women talking about Latina men, the film would never in a million years see the light of day, but since they're a minority, they're apparently allowed.

One of the four women, Andrea, is a lawyer for a teenage girl who is suing her violent ex-boyfriend for child custody. Andrea has a quick fling with Joseph, the (white) lawyer for the opposing side and, despite her best efforts to stop it, the fling quickly turns into a full-fledged love affair. It happens for a few reasons, not the least of which is her husband's (played by Robert Beltran of tv's *Star Trek: Voyager* fame) sudden divorce demand (he's fallen for a white woman). Despite the urging of her enlightened psychologist friend, though, she just can't get the racist "chip off her shoulder."

Meanwhile, the other women carry on utterly irrelevant relationships. One of them falls for a Mexican waiter; the other for a hunky Korean. These affairs don't go much further than making a token, simplistic "racism is bad" statement.

Though made on a low budget (the movie has bragging rights there — the fact that no studio would finance it makes the absence of Latina characters in Hollywood that much more conspicuous), the movie is still badly acted, written and directed.

Though it's supposed to break down barriers, the film constantly resorts to cliches ("it's not a chip on my shoulder, it's a boulder!!"). Its single mildly interesting subplot (the fate of the likeable girl whom Andrea is defending) goes absolutely nowhere and the rest of the movie is hopelessly lacking in elements we may actually care about.

The performances range from the mildly banal to the downright ridiculous. In the film's highlight (strictly because of its inanity), Geoff Rivas shows up as one of the women's gay brother and proceeds to give us one of the worst "quirky transvestite" acts in history. The lead actresses, with the exception of Angela Moya as Lilly, tend to overact, often spouting "emotional" lines with way, way, way too much gusto ("WHY MUST WE ALWAYS HURT EACH OTHER?"). It's a good thing that veterans like Scott Bakula, Robert Beltran and Lupe Ontiveros (in a bit part as one of Andrea's horny aunts) know what they're doing; otherwise, this might have been a total wash out.

*Luminarias* has its heart in the right place, it just doesn't have the script or the actors to make the heart start beating. It doesn't help that despite the movie's "togetherness" theme there's a touch of vindictive anger to all of the proceedings. Had the film provided something beyond token observations on the state of race relations, *Luminarias* may have done better; this way, well-intentioned though it is, all it gets is a

### SCREENING LOG

February 19, 2013

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Ric Roman Waugh, 2013

Score: **C**

February 17, 2013

**Side Effects**

Steven Soderbergh, 2013

Score: **C+**

February 16, 2013

**10 Years**

Jamie Linden, 2012

Score: **B-**

February 15, 2013

**The Place Beyond the Pines**

Derek Cianfrance, 2013

Score: **B+**

February 10, 2013

**Warm Bodies**

Jonathan Levine, 2013

Score: **C**

February 6, 2013

**Beautiful Creatures**

Richard LaGravenese, 2013

Score: **B-**

February 2, 2013

# Robert Beltran



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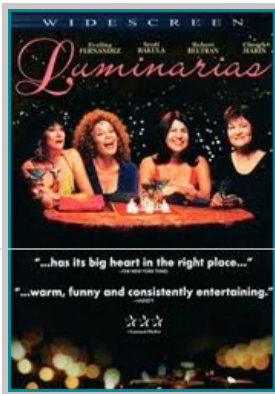
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20.12.2012

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Admin



LOS ANGELES TIMES | 04.05.2000 | KEVIN THOMAS

"Luminarias" takes us into a world all too rarely seen on the big screen: that of upwardly mobile Los Angeles Latinas.

Instead of barrio poverty, gangs and drugs, we're introduced to four women, longtime friends, whose favorite meeting place is the Monterey Park restaurant that gives the film its name. They are Evelina Fernandez's Andrea, a successful attorney; Marta Du Bois' Sofia, a titian-haired Westside therapist; Angela Moya's Lilly, an artist; and Dyana Ortelli's Irene, a clothing designer with her own shop. The film's title clearly also applies to these vibrant women, who light up the screen.

If "Luminarias" sounds like a classic women's picture with a Spanish accent, that's about right. (It's been called a "Latina twist to 'Waiting to Exhale.' ") But because these women are Latinas, it offers a fresh perspective on women's universal concerns and grapples in particular with long-festering hostility toward Anglos that persists even as society is changing and becoming more inclusive.

Adapted by Fernandez from her play and directed by her husband, Jose Luis Valenzuela, a UCLA drama professor in his feature directorial debut, "Luminarias" makes a graceful transition from stage to screen. Some moments are overly theatrical, but "Luminarias" is consistently entertaining and offers some sharp observations of the Latino experience.

Andrea and her husband, Joe (Robert Beltran), live in a mansion, where they are celebrating their wedding anniversary when the film begins. In the course of the evening, Andrea and her pals catch Joe embracing a blond (Barbara Niven). We learn that Joe is a womanizer who may see his philandering as a macho birthright. Andrea throws him out, but this time when he returns, it's not to ask for forgiveness but to tell her that he wants a divorce.



In time, Sofia sets up the stunned, depressed Andrea with a blind date, who turns out to be the attorney (Scott Bakula) representing a husband in a divorce case in which Andrea is representing the wife, her receptionist, Cindy (Seidy Lopez). Cindy is suing on grounds of spousal abuse.

That Andrea and Bakula's Joseph have begun an affair already makes things doubly complicated--doubly because Andrea has deep-seated rage toward Anglos. The film is really about a successful, intelligent woman struggling with reverse racism, and her struggle is echoed in various ways. We witness Andrea's entire Latino world maneuver the often painful, sometimes funny, process of integration and acceptance of those who happen to be different.

Lilly plunges into a romance with a handsome Korean American (Andrew C. Lim), only to find that his parents are shocked because she is a Mexican American.

Sofia has practiced assimilation diligently but has come up empty-handed in the romance department. She's beginning to respond to the ardent pursuit of a Luminarias waiter (Sal Lopez, also the film's producer), wondering if she can bridge their socioeconomic gap.

Irene, who serves mainly as the film's comic relief, is struggling with having given up sex for Lent--and with accepting that her brother (Geoffrey Rivas) not only is gay but also a transvestite.



As a writer, Fernandez is on sure ground when she's confronting serious issues and strong emotions, but sometimes her comedy touches are too theatrical or sitcom for the big screen. This is especially true of Irene and her carryings-on. Much more effective is a sequence set at a backyard family barbecue, where Andrea introduces Joseph to her relatives; here Fernandez can mine the humor in the inherent self-consciousness of the occasion, especially when there are such pros as Cheech

Marin, Lupe Ontiveros and Pepe Serna cast as members of Andrea's family.

Andrea and Joseph's romance reflects the complexity of their situation, socially and professionally, and in its development only once does Fernandez strike a false note, when she has Joseph, presented as a decent, sensitive man, cast a slur upon receptionist Cindy.

Valenzuela's direction has the occasional self-consciousness and unevenness of the first-timer, but on the whole, it keeps us absorbed. Performances are solid, starting with that of Fernandez herself.

The film is intriguing on yet another level: It dares to suggest romance is not over for middle-aged women. What's more, noted Mexican cinematographer Alex Phillips Jr. gives the film a rich, high-contrast look that's not always flattering to the actresses but has an honesty to it.

If "Luminarias" succeeds at the box office, it could open up the screen for more forthright depictions of contemporary Latino life.

[Los Angeles Times. 04.05.2000 \(http://www.latimes.com/topic/cl-movie000504-84,0,1430968.story\)](http://www.latimes.com/topic/cl-movie000504-84,0,1430968.story)

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Film Desk Reviews by James Kendrick

**Director:** Jose Luis Valenzuela

**Screenplay:** Evelina Fernández

**Stars:** Evelina Fernández (Andrea), Scott Bakula (Joseph), Marta DuBois (Sofia), Ángela Moya (Lily), Dyana Ortelli (Irene), Cheech Marin (Jesus), Robert Beltran (Joe), Sal Lopez (Pablo), Seidy Lopez (Cindy), Lupe Ontiveros (Tia Tona)

**MPAA Rating:**R

**Year of Release:** 2000

**Country:** USA

# Luminarias

The title of *Luminarias* comes from a fictional Los Angeles restaurant in which four women in their early 40s regularly gather to discuss their lives—sex, love, marriage, infidelity, work, and the like. What makes *Luminarias* different is that the four women are Latina. While all things Latin have been getting more and more popular in the last few years, there have been almost no movies that have dealt with the lived experienced of Chicanos in the United States. *Luminarias* does just that.

The script was penned by star Evelina Fernández, a two-decade veteran of Hollywood who was tired of the lack of stories being told about American Latinos. Costing just under \$1 million and funded entirely by donations from members of the Latino community all over the United States, *Luminarias* is an effective romantic dramedy that deals with cross-cultural romance, racism, family tensions, and heartbreak. Smoothly directed by Jose Luis Valenzuela, Fernández's husband, the film moves along at a brisk pace, but manages to slow down from time to time to observe the little details that make it feel real.

Fernández stars as Andrea, a successful lawyer whose husband, Joe (Robert Beltran), has recently left her for a younger, white woman. This brings out Andrea's bitter dislike of whites, which stems back to her childhood. This latent racism is ironic because she ends up falling in love with a white, Jewish lawyer named Joseph (Scott Bakula). The complications between Andrea and Joseph are not only racial and cultural, but also professional: They first meet because Andrea is representing a young, battered woman seeking to divorce her violence-prone husband, who is represented by Joseph.

Andrea and Joseph's narrative strand is just one among many. In her script, Fernández deftly weaves together multiple storylines involving the romantic lives of Andrea's Latina friends with whom she shares drinks at Luminarias. They include Lily (Ángela Moya), an artist who has fallen in love with a Korean American (Andrew C. Lim), whose parents do not approve; Irene (Dyana Ortelli), who is battling temptation while attempting to stay celibate during lent; and Sofia (Marta DuBois), a successful therapist who has spent her whole life trying to fit in with "whites," and is now distraught that she is falling in love with a waiter at Luminarias. The irony of the women's lives is that they become romantically involved with someone completely unexpected. The message is that you can't seek love; rather, love finds you.

In writing *Luminarias*, one of Fernández's goals was to tackle and dismantle Latino stereotypes that plague most movies. She is successful in that she focuses on professionals who also have strong cultural ties. In fact, much of the tension in the characters' relationships is linked to the confusion over where they belong: in the "white" business world or in East Los Angeles with their families. This is most daunting for Sofia, who drives a white Mercedes (interesting color choice) and dyes her hair red in an attempt to distance herself from the heritage she knows will always be a part of her.

While dismantling them, Fernández has some fun with the stereotypes. In a scene depicting a family get-together, she swaps expected cliches in showing Andrea's brother, a gangland-type with sunglasses and a long goatee played by Cheech Marin, is actually a professor at UCLA. When Joseph asks Andrea what part of Mexico she is from, her response is, "East L.A." Fernández does not pretend that the Latino community does not have its problems, racial or otherwise. However, she doesn't focus on the problems, and when they are presented, they are presented as human dilemmas that are not reducible to any one social group.

*Luminarias* is most effective when dealing with Andrea and Joseph's complicated relationship. Their scenes together are often very funny, and Fernández and Bakula create a believable romance. That it gets tied up neatly in the end is not particularly surprising. While the main goal of *Luminarias* is to portray the Latino community in an even light, it is also a conventional romantic melodrama, with all the expected plot twists and complications. It is satisfying on that emotional narrative level, but it is even more satisfying in the way it depicts a large segment of the American population in a way that other movies have not.

Copyright Overall Rating: ★★☆☆ (3)

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# Luminarias (2000)

reviewed by  
Harvey S. Karten

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## LUMINARIAS

Reviewed by Harvey Karten New Latin Pictures Director: Jose Luis Valenzuela Writer: Evelina Fernandez, play by Evelina Fernandez Cast: Evelina Fernandez, Scott Bakula, Marta DuBois, Angela Moya, Dyana Ortelli, Seidy Lopez, Robert Beltran, Sal Lopez, Cheech Marin, Sab Shimono

There's nothing wrong with a sitcom, with its predictable, credibility-challenging plot, provided that the characters are vibrant and likeable and the writer's heart is in the right place. That's just the kind of TV-type comedy that "Luminarias" provides. Directed by Jose Luis Valenzuela, "Luminarias" had its birth as a staged play by the director's real-life wife, Evelina Fernandez, which the playwright--who radiates a spirited performance as its lead character--has successfully opened up for the big screen. Despite its mere one million-dollar budget, "Luminarias" is the sort of picture that could make a grand showing in Latino communities throughout the U.S. and given its easy-listening format should draw a reasonable crossover audience as well.

Though the story bears some resemblance to Forest Whitaker's "Waiting To Exhale," which displayed Whitney Houston, Angela Bassett, Loretta Devine and Lela Rochon auspiciously despite that movie's redundant plot, Valenzuela's film deals with men who are not all jerks. What's more important, serious racial issues are discussed in some depth. While the characters in "Waiting to Exhale" are all black, this time we're treated to a Jesse-Jackson rainbow involving Koreans, Korean-Americans, Mexican-Americans, one Jewish-American, and one African-American, all jumbled together in an East Los Angeles nexus. The focus is on four well-to-do, professional Mexican-American women who get together regularly in an Angeleno restaurant known as Luminarias to discuss the men in their lives. They drink margaritas and tequilas, easing the way for the women to let it all hang out. We listen in on their jovial banter and serious arguments alike, absorbing an image of the affinities and antipathies of people we do not often get to see in the movie theaters: prosperous Latinas living in spacious housing, driving Mercedes and the like, and throwing lavish parties for their families and friends.

We quickly learn from their spirited restaurant banter that these women may be of the same professional class but their views on men and race diverge considerably. Andrea (Evelina Fernandez), a domestic relations lawyer in her forties, is herself getting divorced from her wayward husband Joe (Robert Beltran). She is particularly incensed that Joe is cavorting with an Anglo woman, furthering her own racist view that the only reason whites date Latinas is to feel superior. Despite her wealth, she admits to having a deeply felt rage. Her friend Sofia (Marta DuBois), on the other hand, is a therapist who believes in mixing in with the white society and has forsaken her old East Los Angeles neighborhood for the predominantly Anglo west side. Ironically, she is the only one of this gang of four to wind up with a Mexican man, a waiter named Pablo (Sal Lopez) who can barely speak English. In smaller roles Dyana Ortelli plays Irene, a flamboyant clothing designer who is ashamed of her transvestite brother (Geoffrey Rivas) and who has sworn off sex for the Lenten season, while Angela Moya performs in the role of Lilly, an artist who is dating a

Korean man, Lu (Andrew C. Lim).

The one subplot that does not mesh with the buoyant tone of the rest of the story involves Cindy (Seidy Lopez), in a custody battle with the physically abusive ex-husband, Tony (Richard Coca). But as the hub of the story, Scott Bakula turns out a credible performance as Joseph, a lawyer who finds himself opposing Andrea in court. Drawn to his adversary, Joseph is at first rebuffed by Andrea not only because he is fighting against the interests of her client but more important because he is white and Jewish. Struggling with her own racist attitudes toward Anglos, Andrea is frank and cutting as she challenges Joseph to come up with the real reason he is interested in a woman who is not of his race and religion. As in most romantic comedies, their differences keep them apart until the movie's conclusion in which Valenzuela wraps up all the loose ends too conveniently for a tale which seeks to elevate itself above sit-comish fare.

The music is terrific though not intrusive and the upbeat tempo of this good-hearted and spirited comedy makes "Luminarias" easy to take as social commentary that deals with themes of identity, marriage and independence. This is one of those rare pictures that do not treat Spanish-speaking Americans as either gangsters or servants but as people who have prospered in a multi-cultural society that all too often patronizes and demeans even those non-whites who have lived in the U.S. for generations.

Rated R. Running time: 100 minutes. (C) 2000 by Harvey Karten,  
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# Luminarias

A Film Review by James Berardinelli

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**Rating:** ★★ (out of ★★★★★)

**United States, 2000**

**U.S. Release Date:** 5/00 (LA/SF), 10/6/00 (NY)

**Running Length:** 1:40

**MPAA Classification:** R (Profanity, frank sexual language, brief sex)

**Theatrical Aspect Ratio:** 1.85:1

**Cast:** Evelina Fernandez, Scott Bakula, Marta Du Bois, Angela Moya, Dyana Ortelli, Seidy Lopez, Robert Beltran

**Director:** Jose Luis Valenzuela

**Producer:** Sal Lopez

**Screenplay:** Evelina Fernandez

**Cinematography:** Alex Phillips, Jr.

**U.S. Distributor:** New Latin Pictures

*Luminarias*, from the husband-and-wife team of Evelina Fernandez and Jose Luis Valenzuela, has been hailed in many corners as the "Latina version of [Waiting to Exhale](#)." That is, in many ways, an appropriate label, because, like *Waiting to Exhale*, this motion picture is marred by subpar writing and superficial melodrama. Despite strong production values, the film has an amateurish feel, like a sit-com crossed with a soap opera. The result is likely to be of interest only to members of the target audience (females of Latin descent). Sadly, with so few significant roles for Latinas in today's cinema, weak projects like *Luminarias* often represent their best opportunity for exposure.

*Luminarias* had a long and convoluted production history. Initially envisioned as a motion picture, a script was submitted to Columbia Pictures in 1995, but was rejected. Undaunted, writer/actress Fernandez, director Valenzuela, and producer Sal Lopez (the trio behind Sleeping Giant Productions) turned *Luminarias* into a play, which had a successful stage run in the mid-to-late 1990s for The Latino Theater Company at the Los Angeles Theater Center. To turn the play into an independent movie, the filmmakers solicited donations from the L.A. Latin community, raising the \$1 million budget.

The story centers on four Latina friends, each of whom has a clearly identifiable conflict in her life. There's Andrea (Fernandez), a fiery lawyer who is divorcing her unfaithful husband, Joe (Robert Beltran). Despite her dislike of non-Latinos, she finds herself falling for Joseph (Scott Bakula), a Jewish lawyer opposing her in court. Sofia (Marta Du Bois), has turned her back on the Latin community to better fit in with whites, but finds her values challenged when she falls for a Pablo (Sal Lopez), a poor waiter who can barely speak English. Irene (Angela Moya) is a nymphomaniac who has given up sex for Lent and is having difficulty dealing with her brother's homosexuality. And Lilly (Dyana Ortelli) finds herself the victim of racism when the parents of her new boyfriend, Korean Lu (Andrew C. Lim), reject her because she is "Mexican" not "American".

*Luminarias* wants to have it both ways - to be funny and emotionally moving, but the screenplay's propensity for throwing out one-liners undermines the film's dramatic side. The movie is also guilty of trivializing some serious issues, including racism and child/spousal abuse. *Luminarias* breezes past these themes, offering little that's new or interesting, and relying upon facile resolutions for each of its potentially controversial topics. The results are decidedly unsatisfying.

It doesn't help that much of the dialogue falls neatly into one of three categories: artificial conversations, overcooked speeches, and lines obviously concocted to solicit laughter from the audience. It's rare that any exchange between characters contains more than a hint of realism (not to mention anything that could be considered legitimately thought provoking). Lengthy passages sound like actors reciting something that was written down and subsequently memorized. From time-to-time, motion pictures can get away with this kind of thing, but not for the entire running length.

The acting can charitably be called uneven. Each of the four female leads has moments that are howlingly over-the-top (most of these occur when they're all on screen at the same time - consider the opening sequence and the verbal jousting match in Andrea's office). On the other hand, Fernandez and Du Bois at least exhibit some ability in quieter, less intense scenes. Male co-stars Scott Bakula (from TV's *Quantum Leap*) and Robert Beltran (from TV's *Star Trek: Voyager*) are successful because they keep things low key. There are effective cameos by Cheech Marin and Lupe Ontiveros.

*Luminarias* has one standout sequence that does exactly what it sets out to do - explore the sense of alienation that can result when a member of one community is submerged into another culture. The individual in question is Joseph, who is invited to a party being thrown by Andrea's family. The undercurrent of tension is impossible to miss, even though the tone remains deceptively light. One of the great disappointments about *Luminarias* is that the same deft skill evident during this ten minute segment is rarely evident elsewhere.

This is a case when it is easy to laud the filmmakers for their efforts, but, at the same time, to recognize that the best intentions don't always result in a worthwhile final product. *Luminarias* contains the seeds of an intriguing drama, but it is sabotaged by bouts of poor acting and an overwrought script that turns characters into caricatures. As much as I might want to recommend the film based on its cultural significance, I find myself unable to generate any enthusiasm for something this mediocre.

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