



## ***Return to Me***

Showcases Bonnie Hunt's Many Talents

By Brigid Presecky

SPECIAL FOR FILMS FOR TWO<sup>©</sup>

### ***Return to Me***

**Directed by Bonnie Hunt**

**Original Screenplay by Bonnie Hunt & Don Lake**

**(Based on a story by Samantha Goodman & Andrew Stern)**

Imagine the Chicago skyline and the sound of singer Dean Martin's hit single *Return to Me*. This describes the opening sequence of the movie ***Return to Me***. As the credits for this 2000 film first appear on screen, one name fades in and out, for writer, producer, director, actor, and creator—Chicago's own Bonnie Hunt.

Along with her writing partner and longtime colleague Don Lake, Hunt merges two stories into one screenplay. The first story is about a man named "Bob" (played by David Duchovny of *The X-Files* fame). Early in the film, Bob's wife "Elizabeth" (Joely Richardson) is killed in a fatal car crash. The second story is about a waitress named "Grace" (Minnie Driver). Grace has a heart condition, and Elizabeth's heart, which had won Bob over early in their relationship, goes to Grace after Bob donates his wife's organs.

Sometime later, Bob and Grace meet by chance in a North Side bar owned by Grace's grandfather. The deep, unexplained connection that the two suddenly feel for each other leads them to fall in love. But then Grace finds out by chance that the heart she received was transplanted from Bob's dead wife. Troubled by the situation, Grace leaves for Italy unsure of her own feelings as well as Bob's. Since this is a romantic comedy, we go in knowing they'll get back together in the end, but Hunt brings the story full circle when Bob follows Grace to Italy. For the second time, he finds love when he thought he would never have love again.

While the onscreen chemistry between Driver and Duchovny is believable and well-acted in the foreground, you don't forget Duchovny's chemistry with Richardson—it's always there in the background. Despite having only brief screen time at the beginning of the film, Joely Richardson does as much as possible in 20 minutes to

bring Elizabeth to life, and she succeeds in making me want to know more about this ill-fated character.

Hunt injects her comedic know-how into the movie by way of her own character "Megan," Grace's outspoken friend and a member of Grace's large, rambunctious family. She also showcases the talent of veteran television and movie actor Carroll O'Connor (the "Archie Bunker" of *All in the Family* fame) as Grace's grandfather. Hunt's profound respect and appreciation for her family, including elderly members, informs a screenplay that bridges the generation gap between young and old. Additional personal touches include appearances by Lake, Hunt's mother Alice, and her comedy friends David Alan Grier, Jim Belushi, and Holly Wortel.

While hardly a blockbuster, ***Return to Me*** makes for a pleasant rental, especially for fans of Hunt and her beloved Chicago (featured so prominently in the movie). Local filmgoers might recognize the Twin Anchors Bar & Grill in the role of the Irish-Italian restaurant run by Grace's family, and Lincoln Park Zoo is the backdrop for several outdoor scenes.

Even as Bonnie Hunt expands her horizons with her successful NBC daytime talk show *The Bonnie Hunt Show*, she often refers back to ***Return to Me*** as a building block in her career. Hunt demonstrates how a strong, independent, and talented woman can be successful in every phase of movie making. Although she has proved it several times since, Hunt did it first in ***Return to Me***.

© Brigid Presecky (8/15/09)—SPECIAL FOR FILMS FOR TWO®



Photo Credit: Cheryl Corley (5/2/09)