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Hilarious, warm father-son tale's a real winner

BY MARTA BARBER

This review was previously published Jan. 25 during the Miami Jewish Film Festival.

This semi-biographical film by Paul Weiland, who remembers planning for his bar mitzvah amid the family's economic downfall and London's obsession with football finals, is truly a jewel. Hilariously funny and totally believable, *Sixty Six* also leaves you with a warm and fuzzy feeling. It is a father-son tale told with the details and care of someone who was there.

All of England may be consumed by its passion for soccer, but Bernie Rubens, though a fan of the game, has more important things on his mind: his upcoming bar mitzvah. Bernie, a quiet 12-year-old, wants his own celebration to be bigger and better than his older brother's ceremony. Bernie wants "the Cassius Clay of bar mitzvahs; the Jesus Christ of bar mitzvahs." For that purpose he goes about the planning with as much care for detail as a bride for her wedding.

The date will be in the summer, July 11; Bernie doesn't realize that is the day scheduled for the final game of the 1966 World Cup, which will be held in London. Everyone tells him not to worry, that England's team will never be good enough to make it that far.

Sixty Six is English comedy at its best, a mix of exceptional wit, slapstick and unforgettable characters. Bernie's father, Manny, always has a sour puss; he lives in the shadow of his friendlier and better-liked brother. Manny is played by Eddie Marsan, who gives the sullen fellow an air of Mr. Bean or John Cleese. He's the perfect straight man to Bernie (Gregg Sulkin), who keeps bugging his dad to make all the arrangements for the upcoming celebration.

Helena Bonham Carter plays Esther, Bernie's mom, and while her character is filled with hidden humor, she is far from being a caricature. Also funny in a mischievous way is Stephen Rea, who plays a non-Jewish doctor.

When England keeps winning games, Bernie starts getting nervous about his coming-of-age celebration. Worse still, his father is more preoccupied with the business he lost than with the bar mitzvah. Money is scarce; the big party has to be downsized, and who will even attend on such a date?

Narrow in scope and old-fashioned in content, *Sixty Six* is the sort of comedy you rarely see today: It appeals to audiences over 40, and it has been made in the best English comic tradition. That might not be everyone's cup of tea, but I had a blast.

Cast: Eddie Marsan, Gregg Sulkin, Helena Bonham Carter, Catherine Tatke, Stephen Rea

Director: Paul Weiland

Screenwriters: Bridget O'Connor, Peter Straughan

Producers: Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, Elizabeth Karlsen

A First Independent Pictures release. Running time: 93 minutes. Language, some sexual content, brief nudity. Playing at: In Broward: Oakwood, Sawgrass, Pompano Beach; in Palm Beach: Shadowood, Delray Beach.

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