

VICKY CRISTINA BARCELONA (PUBLISHED IN TIME OFF MAGAZINE,
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Director: Woody Allen

Starring: Scarlett Johansson, Penelope Cruz, Javier Bardem,
Rebecca Hall, Patricia Clarkson

Reviewed by: Vicki Englund

Some critics are hailing Woody Allen's latest as "a return to form", but I think they say that about every second film he makes. If your output's as voluminous as a film a year, you've got the right to come up short of perfection occasionally.

The legendary writer/director/actor always made European films stylistically; it's just that in the past few years he's now making them in Europe rather than his beloved New York. As the title suggests, this one's set in Barcelona, with the gorgeous Gaudi architecture a feast for the eyes.

Johansson plays a typically Woody Allen female character in Cristina - a confused, arty type who's looking for the perfect love but is always destined to be disappointed. While on holiday in Barcelona, she and her sensible, engaged friend Vicky (the impressive Hall), meet up with charming artist, Juan Antonio (Bardem), who invites them to sleep with him...together. They end up doing so separately, and thus begins a love triangle which becomes a quadrangle when Juan Antonio's beautiful and mentally unhinged ex (Cruz) appears.

The film explores one of Woody's well trodden themes to do with the trade-offs some people make for stability and security as opposed to others who yearn for the excitement of new relationships. It's often very amusing and the performances are brilliant across the board, especially Cruz who's a powerhouse.

A recent interview had Woody saying he wasn't a great filmmaker but had a talent to amuse. Let's hope the 73 year-old continues to amuse for a long time to come.