



CINECOM

The Lucca family congregates in *Queen of Hearts*.

★ ★ ★ *Queen of Hearts*
Center, Hippodrome

For a movie that's very amusing, *Queen of Hearts* can become quite serious. It has young lovers eloping melodramatically, high-stakes gambling, possible suicide, possible murder and a lonely man consumed by a passionate desire for revenge. Of course, it also has a talking pig.

The pig appears in a vision to Danilo, an amiable, lazy man who has brought his dirt-poor Italian family to live in England. The swine offers him some valuable gambling tips and Danilo wins enough money to purchase a small

but successful cafe.

Though renowned for his apparent luck at cards, Danilo stops gambling. "I have everything I want," he says. This seems like an admirable lack of greed. But in truth, the gambling is probably too much work for him.

So life rambles on. His older son Bruno is a hotheaded fellow who tires of Danilo's careless ways and huffs off to join the entertainment industry. His mother-in-law wanders around muttering complaints, praying for their souls and rushing off to confession to reveal everybody else's sins. And young Eddie, Danilo proudly asserts, is

special.

Eddie is an observant boy who narrates the film. At first, this seems to be Eddie's movie. But *Queen of Hearts* is too disjointed, too idiosyncratic for that.

Danilo's father suddenly shows up, apparently just to irk his mother-in-law and to have a good time.

Then Bruno returns with presents and a flashy new suit. He's become a debt collector for Barbariccia, who may be connected to the Mafia and is certainly connected to Danilo: Barbariccia's betrothed was whisked away at the last minute by Danilo, and he will not rest until he gets what is rightfully his — Danilo's wife.

If it sounds like *Queen of Hearts* wanders all over the place, then you're getting the right idea. This is a messy movie. Its characters are noisy and unpredictable and they do noisy and unpredictable things. They're also funny in a believable, low-key way.

Director Jon Amiel, who helmed the highly acclaimed *The Singing Detective*, delights in the sloppy script. He adds subtle satire, whimsical humor and finely tuned performances to the mix. Yes, the story is far too unfocused. But that's half the fun: *Queen of Hearts* is a casual, charming little tale in no hurry to reach its end.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ