

CHÉRI

**A BK Films / PATHÉ UK Film Council / Aramid Entertainment Presentation
A Bill Kenwright Production
A film by Stephen Frears**

Film reviewed by Franco P. Visser

Chéri is a film that deals in essence with the age-old issue of love, and more specifically forbidden love. It is a sumptuous and sensual film based on the novels Chéri and La Fin de Chéri by Colette, exploring love through the eyes and soul of Lea de Lonval (played by Michelle Pfeiffer). Lea is a well to do, upper-class 'prostitute' – albeit that Lea prefers not to be known by this title, opting rather to be seen as having a unique and lucrative 'way' with rich men that in turn secures her financial independence – so to speak. The film is set in Belle Époque Paris in the 19th century.

Just as Lea is contemplating 'retirement', she is approached by her long-time friend and 'colleague', Madame Charlotte Peloux (played by Kathy Bates) to engage her son, Chéri (played by Rupert Friend) in lessons regarding love. Chéri is about to get married to Edmee (played by Felicity Jones), the daughter of Madame Marie Laure (played by Iben Hjejle) another successful and enterprising woman of pleasure. The catch is that Lea falls head-over-heels in love with Chéri, and he with her. An "affair" complicated by true feelings of love. This can only lead to disaster.

Michelle Pfeiffer is brilliantly cast as the ageing woman character that is Lea. It is as if many of Michelle's own qualities and life-issues can be seen in the character of Lea; and Lea's extreme longing and broken heart in Michelle's eyes through her superb portrayal. How the film ends, as usual, I leave for you to discover.

With Valentine's Day recently passed, my viewing of the film Chéri coincided with a time in the year where 'love' is celebrated and flaunted for all to rekindle, reaffirm, or revisit. Many great love stories have been portrayed on film, or in written format, and yet I have the distinct impression that still we are at a loss of fully grasping or understanding what love really is. This led me to formulate my own definition of a difficult, yet magical and wondrous concept, and I would like to share it here with you.

Love is a concept that is best defined by not one single term, or experience or feeling. Love can be found on many levels within a meaningful and intimate relationship. Love exists alongside peace. Patience and compassion are its companions. It keeps company with sacrifice, emotional longing and excitement. Love expresses itself in the physical, emotional and spiritual spheres. Fear, doubt and insecurity are abolished by love. Love continuously creates expectation and yearning. Love forgives easily, it never hold grudges or keep hatred alive. Love grows with effort, determination and hard-work. Love is strong. Love

has a sense of humour and can cope with the deepest levels of despair. In an intimate relationship love takes risks.

Lea and Chéri journey through their experience of love with great highs and sorrowful depths of despair. Their love is forbidden, not merely because of Charlotte's strong vocal opinions regarding the matter, but also because society at that time frowned upon such love. You did not marry your 'mistress' and you certainly did not dare becoming 'serious' about such a relationship. The film provides the viewer with a true emotional journey. A great script, scenery and wonderful costumes makes viewing Chéri a must for everyone.

I leave you with part of a well-known saying that I hope might put an idea or two in your mind, or open up opportunities for you towards more fulfilling experiences, or maybe just to get you thinking about love and its unique place in our lives today: 'love as if there is no tomorrow... love as though you have never been hurt before.....' Amen to that!

