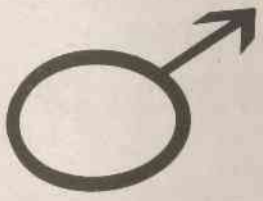
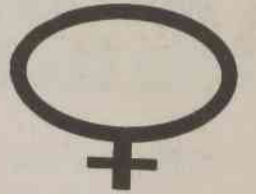


# Arts



## HE SAID, She Said



Michele Choate  
Movie Reviewer

Movie review:

## Evita



Windy Gordon  
Movie Reviewer



Rating: PG  
Director: Alan Parker

Hate musicals?...Stay at home. If you can sometimes tolerate a really good musical, give this one a chance...it might just grab you.

Evita is a film version of the 1970's Tim Rice/Andrew Lloyd Webber Broadway rock musical of the same name. The story is of Eva Peron (Madonna), a woman of humble working class origins and illegitimate birth, who captures the heart and hand of Argentine eventual dictator, Juan Peron (Jonathan Pryce) and in the process becomes a heroine of the "little people". Argentina of the 40's and 50's suffers from high unemployment, poor living conditions, and civil unrest among the labor class. Before her untimely death from cancer at the age of 33, Evita endears herself to the masses through her very public acts of charity and her open denunciation of the country's privileged few. Yet, her glamour and her comfort with the trappings of wealth, are largely responsible for her public appeal. The film challenges us to explore Eva's motivations. Was her true ambition to champion the poor or to acquire fame and adoration? (Remember: Eva was an actress prior to becoming first lady).

The music, choreography, and camera work are remarkable. The movie should be a must for film students.. However, the no-dialogue, all-music platform is tiresome at times and makes the storyline somewhat murky. Those unfamiliar with Argentine history would benefit from a short primer before seeing the film.

Madonna purportedly wrote Parker a letter begging to be chosen for the role of Eva Peron..... Her performance was remarkable. Antonio Banderas was equally as good in his role as Che, the wandering narrator. Who knew he could sing?

\*\*\* Evita is not a movie in the traditional sense; however, it is fascinating entertainment.

Maybe it really is the "Year of the Woman." Everyone was caught up in the wonderful achievements of women at last summer's Olympic games, and those women are minor leaguers compared to Eva Peron and her film stand-in, Madonna. Too seldom is Hollywood willing to invest precious production dollars in a story about a woman. Especially a woman who is strong, assertive and achieving. Equally rare are the occasions when Hollywood hires the strong, assertive professional to play such a character. "Evita" gives us a full screen view of two of the most notable women of this half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Eva Peron's story is not always noble, nor always uplifting. She used what she had at her disposal to rise above the ghettos of Buenos Aires. With a bit of talent, a larger bit of beauty and a huge amount of self-assurance, Eva worked, cajoled and seduced her way to the pinnacle of Argentine culture. Who knows how she mixed her talents, efforts and allure? She was neither the saint described by her admirers nor the tramp described by her enemies. Eva Peron did what she needed to. How are we to judge her when we know so little of how she rose so far?

Once she reached her place in the sun, Eva wore diamonds and haute couture. The ghetto fell away as she traveled to the world's capital cities and dined with kings, prime ministers, and presidents. Yet, events suggest that there was more to Eva Peron than self-serving luxury. She had everything that the privileged could hope for, but it seems that she was more than a greedy opportunist. Eva wanted to take the people of Argentina, her "companeros", along for the ride. "Evita" is clearly cast around the idea that people of Argentina lived a richer life through their love of and fascination with Eva Peron.

If the central premise of this story is identifying with another person to feel a different life, then who else could have played Eva but Madonna. For the last decade Americans have been fascinated with projecting themselves into Madonna's life and she has never resisted us. The "Material Girl" has consistently chosen a public life served up to us in glossy photos and steamy rock videos. She has taken us along on her own ascent to the top of pop music, pop culture and left a wake of wild eyed, bleached blonde, bustier clad, admirers and wannabes. Madonna didn't lift us out of squalor and poverty, but she let us leave our safe, white bread lifestyles and dance closer to the flame without having to fear getting burned.

Yes, this film is about two women, the hero of a country and the hero of a culture. It is also a jam-packed, rocking, vibrant songfest that sweeps us up and carries us through an interesting story. Within minutes of the first frame, the music of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice and the brilliant images of Alan Parker start to pound home the message, "This is no mere musical. Don't look for rhapsodic sweetness 'a la Mitsy Gaynor in 'South Pacific.'" This score, these images, the wide open vistas of the exterior shots take "Evita" to a level that is much more than a musical.

Antonio Banderas, in the first minutes of his performance as Che, takes possession of the story line. In fact, he is so strong that it takes a crowd of thousands and the most memorable song of the film, to displace him from center stage, and then he is only out of mind for a few moments. Banderas saunters, struts, strolls, and stands through his scenes as the mysterious ever present observer, narrator, and sometimes companion of Eva Peron. Who could have been such a pervasive presence, such an adoring fan and so steadfast a companion? Is he Argentina? As he dances with Madonna/Eva are we watching the sweet but tragic final embrace of a

nation in love with a woman who opens the curtains and allows everyone to see true privilege? Whomever Banderas is meant to be, he stands out as a real treat amid the many pleasures of this movie.

Some weeks before the film opened, critics began to decry elevating a dictator's wife to such lofty heights. "We shouldn't open our hearts to a story praising Peron. She was party to a reign of brutal repression, violent control of political opposition and 'strongman politics' of the worst type." Yes, all of that is probably true, but this story isn't about jackbooted thugs and bloody conflicts between different political powers. Those events are backdrop; this is a love story. When Eva Peron was lifted far above her miserable beginnings, when she found the gold ring in her hand and had the world at her feet, she didn't turn her back on the place of her birth. Though she was elevated to modern day royalty, she reached out to and embraced the dirty, street weary people of Argentina's farms and Buenos Aires' ghettos.

It is as if the homecoming queen asked her chubby childhood friend to take her to the dance. Who doesn't feel some thrill of excitement when that poor guy finally stands in the spotlight with the most beautiful girl in school? With each line of score in this story, we are able to watch Eva and the people of Argentina take another turn on the dance floor. It is no wonder that their heads are spinning and hearts are breaking when fate takes their dream date out of their arms before the dance is over.

Should we have homecoming queens or Eva Perons? Maybe not, but I bet the big boy standing alone in a rented tuxedo hoping to hold her close one more time believes that the homecoming queen is better than life itself. I also bet the people of Argentina, lifted so close to happiness by their dear Evita, would love to hear that music play and feel her lead them in the dance just one more time.