

BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS

## Prentice Penny (Director). *Uncorked*

Written by Penny Prentice. Produced by Penny Prentice, Jill Ahrens, Ryan Ahrens, Ben Renzo, Datari Turner, Chris Pollack, and Jason Michael Berman. Distributed by Netflix, 2020, 1 h 44 min.

Liberty Vittert 

Washington University in St. Louis

Email: [liberty.vittert@gmail.com](mailto:liberty.vittert@gmail.com)

As a statistician and wine lover, I sat down to write my first review for this *Journal* with my horn-rimmed glasses, a notepad, the wine almanac, my laptop, and my iPad. I was ready for a serious review of a documentary and the intense googling that would accompany it.

(Yes, I did dip into my brother's wine cellar—he has the more expensive...eh hem...more sophisticated palate—I mean you must taste the product!)

But little did I know that the iPad for googling was not necessary, and that I was about to dive into a hip hop pumping, spell-binding, drama ... for which I was woefully unprepared.

Frankly, I am not sure whether this movie made me more hungry or thirsty, but it certainly made me want to go to sommelier classes in Paris. What did it not do? Teach me anything about wine. But to its credit, it is an awesome drama (to this unsophisticated movie watcher) and provided a very enjoyable evening.

The absolute focus of the movie is the unflappable love and support of a mother, the push and pull between father and son, from following in the family business to paving his own path. I will refrain from discussing the age-old adage of father and son, but should you decide to search through Netflix for this movie, you should understand that while intertwined, wine has a distant second place in the storyline.

Commenting that red meat pairs well with Pinot Noir was about the highest level of wine discrimination, along with how to read the five main parts of a wine label (name, region, varietal, vintage, and alcohol percentage). But there is some discussion about sommelier school.

But let me go back to the beginning. The movie begins with quite a juxtaposition—images of centuries-old wineries in the French countryside, beer laboratories that any academic professor would kill for, the stirring of tomato sauce in a back kitchen for some baby back ribs, and tub-thumping hip hop.

As the music rolls to a stop, we are brought into the quiet trance of what looks like an everyday wine store, with the main character meticulously placing the bottles, label front and center, down to the millimeter, where he then launches into a sales pitch to a customer with an analogy of white wine to hip hop. From Chardonnay, being the

granddaddy of wine, versatile and smooth like Jay-Z; to a Pinot Grigio, a wine with a bit of spice likened to Kanye West; and finally a Riesling, crisp, clean, and sweet, the Drake of white wine. The customer took the Drake (Riesling may not be my favorite, but I appreciated the choice).

Following that, we get an inkling of our protagonist's dreams and the plot line while he stares at a sommelier diploma from the Southeastern Academy of Sommeliers on the wall before having to rush to his job as a short-order cook at his family's BBQ joint.

Now, the only part of the movie that was wine-intense was—to some degree—the sommelier aspect. Having attended Le Cordon Bleu Paris for a year before delving into the world of statistics, I had many friends attending the sommelier and wine management programs both at Le Cordon Bleu Paris and at other institutions around the city. While there was dramatization in this movie (and yes, I realize this is a drama, so by definition, a dramatization), the cutthroat culture, the late nights studying foreign terms, the outrageous amount of financial capital necessary, and the intensity of the instruction all rang true.

And to be fair to what I see as the art, science, and dedication necessary to make a great wine, we see scenes of our protagonist with his father, picking wood from a wood distribution center, carefully choosing the mixture of cherry and hickory, with the apple not quite seasoned well enough for the father's taste for his small family BBQ joint.

While the father is berating his son for thinking about sommelier school when he is clearly being groomed to head the restaurant, we are made to understand the dedication, attention, and palate that are necessary—whether you are cooking sauce ingredients or blending grape varietals. Father and son both have magnificent palates but very divergent interests. This comes up many times, from the father at the butcher discussing the thickness level of fat, to his son discussing the tannin levels of his own wine.

There were some fabulous moments. Those of us that enjoy wine probably know them all too well. Some love the idea of a blind tasting, but for others, it promotes hives. The use of the girlfriend's favorite special mug as a spit cup was a good moment (although this reviewer has never used a spit cup—who would waste a good product?).

There are many moments when the film explains wine to someone who is less than a beginner, or indeed, to someone who knows absolutely nothing. Still, comparing wine to BBQ is beautifully done: as Memphis is to ribs or Texas is to brisket, so Argentina is to Malbec and Provence to Rose. This could be the first time my own father (a teetotaler but BBQ connoisseur) might have some understanding of what regional wine means. While this may not be news and perhaps too simplistic for readers of this *Journal*, I will recommend that if you have a friend or loved one who has not been interested in wine, they might gain a tidbit or two from this movie.

A father's pride in his son is a beautiful thing, which you will witness in this movie, but perhaps in a way that is not quite how one would expect. The twist at the end had me yelling at the screen, but the final ending had me crying. In summary, I would not call this a wine lover's movie, but if you have someone new to wine, it could be a very nice way to enjoy a glass together.