

Athens Review *Online*

The right romance

By Jennifer Stone

People were still unwrapping Christmas presents in some time zones when my e-mail in box started to fill up with ideas for Valentine's Day. After a brief feeling of *deja vu* to my old days of working in the retail industry -- where there is about a two-and-a-half second pause between one holiday and the next -- I decided to start putting all those ideas into a folder, just so I could pass on a few to you.

So if you're still looking for that perfect way to romance your sweetie, hopefully I can help you find a little inspiration.

The right threads

It just wouldn't be right if I didn't begin with the first sales pitch I received. And when I read the e-mail, I laughed right out of my chair.

Let me introduce to you the smitten. It's marketers describe the product as "a heart-shaped mitten of Polar fleece containing two cuffs allowing you and your honey to hold hands tenderly and warmly while braving the outdoors this winter."

Well, who wouldn't be intrigued by such a description? So I immediately logged onto the Website, www.smitten.com, curious to what such a product would look like.

Not only were there pictures of a happy couple strolling contentedly, their hands linked inside the smitten, there is also an owner's manual for the \$10.95 mitten.

Here's an excerpt:

"When wearing a Smitten, chances are the two of you are out-of-doors away from chores, away from TV, away from computers and the telephone (no cell phones allowed). Fresh air is good. Privacy and intimacy are better. Feel free to walk, talk, sit, nuzzle without any distractions or interference ...Caution: You should come to a complete stop before engaging in nuzzling."

Although I looked, I didn't find any cautionary statements about making sure you use the other hand when your nose starts to itch.

They offer all kinds of shipping options, so it might not be too late to get your very own smitten.

Setting the mood

It's two days to Valentine's Day, and it's come down to the wire. Feeling a little pressure?

Retailer Sam Goody has a new Website which presents Valentine's Day struggles in a humorous light. Check out www.crankycupid.com.

The site touts itself as, "A site for lovesick Valentines or those just sick of Valentine's Day." It offers up everything from breakup lines for those who aren't in the right relationship to the best love songs ever.

Don't think the site authors are going to suggest spending the night listening to an old rendition of "You Light Up My Life" or Bryan Adams wailing out "Everything I Do" either. There's something for every musical taste. Of course, if you're a hopeless sap like me, bring on the Bryan Adams.

Here are a few of their best love songs:

- "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" -- Diana Ross
- "Crash into Me" -- Dave Mathews Band
- "Love of My Life" --Brian McKnight
- "Imagine" -- John Lennon
- "Sexual Healing" --Marvin Gaye
- "My Girl" --Temptations

Also included on the site is a survey the company conducted about Valentine's Day. For those who responded to Sam Goody's survey, the best song for Valentine's Day is, "I Live for Your Love" by Natalie Cole. "Tonight, I Celebrate My Love" by Peabo Bryson and Roberta Flack, and "Heaven in Your Arms" by R.J.'s Latest Arrival, tied for second place.

If you ask me, the survey respondents were heavily weighted on the under 18 side. Where's the Barry White? And of course no night is complete without John Mayer's "Your Body is a Wonderland."

If you still have no idea what to do for your honey, you're not alone. One third of survey respondents said they don't plan for Valentine's Day, resorting to cliché gifts at the last minute.

That doesn't always work, the site says. The Cranky Cupid offers the following advice:

"Sure, dinner and a movie is always a safe bet for a date, but c'mon, show some creativity. Women dream about adventurous dates and rightfully so. If you don't get creative soon she will opt for someone who will. Even if it doesn't go exactly as planned, she will most likely appreciate the effort more than a night of a crappy film and a table at Denny's."

Don't worry too much if you're dateless either. Twenty-one percent of people on the survey said they will spend the evening alone. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that more than 80 million adults (age 18 and over) will spend the holiday unattached and American Greetings says about 62 percent of valentines sold are for family and friends, while only 38 percent are romantic.

Go out with friends. There's no reason to stay at home. Who knows, you might meet the one you've been looking for. If you do, the Cranky Cupid has a pick-up recommendation: "Just say hi."

Cooking up romance

To say I got a hundred recipes in the last two months would be an understatement. Ideas for everything from rack of lamb to cr/me bržl/e with shortbread cookies landed on my desk. Valentine's Day is overwhelming enough without struggling with a souffl/.

Robert Meyers-Lussier, author of "This Is Delicious! What Is It?" seems to agree with me. His publicity people sent me some of his tips for a romantic dinner.

The author recommends hand-fed foods, such as strawberries. But Meyers-Lussier's advice on what not to do is especially noteworthy:

- Don't serve huge portions of food; feeling weighed down and stuffed is not romantic.
- Don't serve big courses.
- Save the garlic for another day
- Don't serve everything at once. Space out the courses.
- Don't forget the old standards -- create the right ambiance with soft music, dimmed lights, and candles.

Stepping out

If you're looking to let somebody else do the cooking, chances are your favorite restaurant is either booked full on reservations by now or you're going to be waiting in line for awhile. But don't give up, there are still options open.

One great idea right here at home will be at the East Texas Arboretum. The organization is offering it's first Valentine in the Park event from 6:30 until 9:30 p.m. The night will include dancing in the pavilion, stargazing, movie in the park and games. The night is supposed to be chilly and partly cloudy, so dress warm for this one.

Tickets are \$10 each and can be picked up at the arboretum, which is on Patterson Road just off U.S. Highway 175.

I can recommend this event with just two words: chocolate arbor. How can you turn down such a delight? For a little extra money, there will be a dessert bar and pictures available.

For more information e-mail Teresa at www.etabs@mycvc.net or call 903.675.5630.

Another event I found with reservations still available will be at the Doubletree Hotel in Dallas. If creativity is your goal, try Keith & Margo's St. Valentine's Day Massacre. No, massacre is not a typo.

The \$179 per couple ticket includes show, dinner, dancing, tax and gratuities. Somewhere in the middle of a gourmet dinner and the next selection by a professional DJ, there is a murder mystery to

be solved, and prizes available for the sharpest sleuths. You can even stay the night in the hotel for an extra charge.

You have to hurry on this one, because it takes place on Saturday night. To see all the info, log onto www.murdermysterytexas.com.

Enjoy yourself

No matter what you decide to do, keep it simple and have fun. Don't give into the pressure to provide the perfect evening.

Back to that Sam Goody survey, when asked why they celebrate Valentine's Day, 41 percent of participants said: "Because it was a day to celebrate their lovers," 32 percent: "Because they liked Valentine's Day" and 16 percent: "Because they are forced to (surprisingly, one percent more women gave this answer than men)."

So, you might ask, what am I doing for Valentine's Day? That's my secret.

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