"Cruising"--blueprint for carnage?
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ENTERTAINMENT



"Cruising"-----blueprint for Carnage?

Harold Fairbanks



CARMINE STIPO (as the bartender) and AL PACINO (as Steve Burns) in a scene from "Cruising."

The hottest ticket in town is "Cruising," a new movie and subject of widespread controversy for seven months. Picketing by militant gays during location shooting in New York City prompted the filmmakers and the studio to grant interviews and release several position papers. Recently a few nationwide theatre chains debated whether they should play the picture, which had been booked sight unseen.

All these developments were endlessly reported in the press, generating free publicity and notoriety the movie might not otherwise have enjoyed. It created a "want to see" factor, a press agent's dream, and "Cruising" will likely be one of the most financially successful pictures of the year, with a minimum of advertising dollars being spent.

THE MOVIE

Al Pacino plays an undercover cop sent into the New York leather bars to nab a killer that has been preying on the patrons. Establishing himself in a seedy Village flat. Pacino costumes himself as a potential trick and infiltrates the S&M haunts. Spotting a likely suspect, he sets him up for a vice squad bust, then learns this was a false lead. In subsequent developments, clues point to another man. Richard Cox, so Pacino stalks him and deliberately become a target in hopes of provoking another murder attempt.

The film explores the surface of the subject, roaming voyeuristically through the leather world and using it as a prop without significant comment. The characters, from cop to killer, are cardboard - no hint of motivation, no exploration of real or mental history.

Violence is a gratuitous and graphic tool in telling the story. The intent is to shock, and in that respect the film succeeds. Though it fails as a compelling character study, a mystery (we spot the killer early on) or an accurate depiction of a segment of the gay community, James Contner's moody photography and Bud Smith's well-paced editing create a tension that covers the script's intellectual bankruptcy.

It is a profoundly affecting picture, simply from the preponderance of violence and the distasteful exploitation of a subject writer-director William Friedkin has appropriated for sensationalizing. Only the police brutality episodes ring true. Judging "Cruising" overall, there is a sickening feeling of watching an autopsy being conducted on a body that died in vain for a cause. then was subjected to an additional indignity of having the innards exploited for insignificant purpose.

Under the circumstances, the actors deliver the best performances to be had within the

confines of the script, because Friedkin has not allowed them to go afield in developing characters beyond his limited point of view. This is, first and foremost, a director's picture. Al Pacino, an intense and usually inventive actor, is held in check, though Paul Sorvino, as his superior on the police force, comes across as a compassionate man. Richard Cox, the killer, is an actor of considerable presence and successfully conveys desperation in the film's closing moments, but his talent and range remains to be tested in future work.

MOTIVATION Why make a movie like "Cruising?" Gerald Walker's 1969 novel had a well-developed plot and set of characters but William Friedkin has used only its skeleton. Instead, he's misinterpreted the tone and spirit of a series of articles by Arthur Bell published in the Village Voice, and borrowed the circumstances surrounding a number of gay murders (most notably that of Weekly Variety film critic Addison Verrill) to graft on his screenplay as justification for creating a homosexual "Looking For Mr.

Perhaps the urge to coin a new gay stereotype was irresistible. After all, Friedkin had directed the screen version of Mart Crowley's play "Boys in the Band" in 1969. Maybe he wanted to show the other side of

Goodbar."

gaydom, but in doing so he is again telling the world that all homosexual men should be judged (or recognized) by those he's chosen to display. That was not true a decade ago and is not now.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment regarding Friedkin's sensibilities is that, having familiarized himself with homosexuality enough to know that Upper West Side queens are no more representative of the gay community as a whole than the

leather set in "Cruising," he doggedly pursued this myopic vision for personal gain. Men like Friedkin are dangerous.

It might be possible to dismiss the work of an uninformed film-maker or at least acquaint him with a more balanced point of view, but when one who knows better simply chooses to ignore the facts and prey on a group of gays unnecessarily, his crime is no less serious than that of the killer depicted in his movie. It's social irresponsibility on a grand scale, reckless disregard for people's lives and feelings in pursuit of the buck

THEIMPLICATIONS

When it comes to assigning blame for "Cruising," there's more than plenty to go around. After all, who was responsible for financing and distributing William Friedkin's distorted views? Lorimar Productions bankrolled "Cruising." Primarily a company associated with television shows (the long running series "The Waltons," for example), Lorimar only recently entered theatrical production. Their "Avalanche Express" was a boxoffice and artistic failure, but that could be written off to complications because their major star and director died before the picture was completed. They also financed the fine movie "Being There," but that doesn't quite negate the bad taste left from "The Choirboys," one of their earlier forays into homophobia. The question is: for every one of their better efforts, are we to be subjected to another that distorts and maligns a segment of the public?

The same might be said of United Artists, the distributor of "Cruising." This studio's antecedents are well-documented (Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin et al once owned it) and in recent years it seems to have become a collective for avant garde filmmakers of all nations. They distribute films worldwide, not all of which reach the U.S. - for instance, they own several



AL PACINO and RICHARD COX (as Stuart Richards) in a scene from "Cruising.



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'CRUISING'

Weintraub; writer-director, William Friedkin, based on the novel by Gerald

Walker; photography, James Contner; editor, Bud Smith; music score &

min. MPAA rating: R. Now showing at Southern California theatres and

Original songs, Jack Nitzsche.

A United Artists release of a Lorimar Production. Producer, Jerry

Reviewed at MGM Studios, Culver City, Feb. 13, 1980. Running time: 106.

AL PACINO in "Cruising."





AL PACINO in "Cruising."

adverse effects. He has zeroed in on a minority within a minority and, what's worse, totally misread the design of their social and sexual practices. What is primarily role playing (from ultramacho attitude to costume and uniform fantasy) has been deliberately interpreted as sinister. simply because the real-life counterparts are associated with violence and aberrant behavior.

Pasolini films never shown in this

country - but lately, for every

"Sunday Bloody Sunday" there

has been the likes of "Cruising."

In 1974, their "Busting" gave the

gay community another black eye

and more recently, "Windows"

portrayed an alleged lesbian as

the instigator of rape, in addition

"Windows" was a minor pic-

ture, a debut directing exercise

for noted cinematographer

Gordon Willis. But who okayed

opinions on "Cruising" in particu-

general. United Artists and

based - but in separate offices - at

10202 W. Washington Blvd.,

THE RAMIFICATIONS

hold the leather gays up for.

observation can only have

William Friedkin's decision to

Culver City, CA 90230.

to being psychotic.

But who created the molds, who provided the models that were socially acceptable because of their manly look and physical prowess? It was heterosexuals, wasn't it? For all the supposed research Friedkin did, the technical advisors he used and whose alleged experiences he borrowed (the "Cruising" press kit, all 11/2 pounds of it, tries to justify their position), he has utterly failed to realize a crucial point. The majority of gay S&M practices do not end in violence and death. What is presented as an attitude in a bar or a fantasy via costume does not necessarily indicate the sexual experience two males attracted to each other will actually

It's a come-on to pair men with similar mind trips. S&M practices are primarily psychological rather than the infliction of physical harm. Yes, pain is a part of it, and that pain may be the road to ecstasy for some, but there is a subtle difference.

Pain does not equal violence or death. And it is not the exclusive province of homosexuals. Many of those into S&M are not clad in leather, and even more of them are not gay. Has Friedkin ever listened to the sounds emanating from those notoriously straight bedroom communities in America? Probably not, since he has chosen to indict a group of gay men and pin a murder rap on them besides.

There are murderers in every cross-section of society, deranged people in the mainstream of life who will seize on illustrations of bizarre circumstances as justification for their

own criminal behavior. Will those copycats use the suggestions in a recklessly-conceived movie or TV show as a blueprint for carnage? (The 1966 TV movie "Doomsday Flight" provoked a rash of airline hijack/bombings, and more recently another television film "Born Innocent" dramatized the delights of jailhouse rape.)

This is not to infer that everymentally distressed viewer of "Cruising" will run from the theatre and kill the first leather number that crosses their path. Those who make movies have every right to present their views. but that right also carries with it a responsibility to portray the subject accurately, not manufacture a deliberately biased viewpoint detrimental to a body of innocent people. William Friedkin, producer Jerry Weintraub, Lorimar Productions and United Artists have shirked this responsibility. Any negative ramifications from "Cruising" can be attributed to

The gay community has every right to be upset over the provocation so shamefully glamorized in "Cruising," but it has also caused a Catch-22 situation. By so publicly opposing the picture, both in production and distribution, they have held it up for scrutiny by the very individuals who may become tomorrow's killers. On the other hand, by not speaking out, irresponsible filmmakers could interpret it as a sign that anything goes. There is no middle ground in this situation, and only time will tell what problems, if any, "Cruising" has caused the gay community.

It's getting to people.



"GAY ATHEIST LEAGUE OF AMERICA may well be the fastest growing gay group concerned with the issue of religion in America today "ADVOCATE, Jan. 10, 1980

IF YOU BELIEVE organized religion is the greatest enemy of lesbians and gay men write for free copy of GALA Review to: GALA, P.O.BOX 14142, SAN FRANCISCO CA 94114

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