

Prince - difficult, but worth it

by Ken Burke

I had a difficult time figuring out just exactly what I thought about **Prince of the City** before I wrote this review. I knew that it was a worthy film, brilliant in most aspects and featuring an outstanding performance by Treat Williams in the lead role. But at times I felt distanced by the film's uncompromising, matter-of-fact attitude towards its subject, which (paradoxically) eventually made the film a success in my view. The story, of a guilt-ridden New York cop who agrees to work undercover to expose corruption and gets caught up in a legal whirlpool which pulls him down and compromises all of his principles, is excellent, but it is so single-minded that it took me until the very end of this near-three hour movie to become emotionally caught up in it.

The reason that the movie does work in the end is that it is so single-minded. At three hours length, it has one obsessive story, no sub-plots, no comic relief, no unconventional characters; only one main char-

acter whom the entire film focuses on, and hardly any shifts in mood. You could also say that for a "police" movie, there are very few action scenes, and also no recognizable stars among the cast. But it works for just those reasons -- it is so unified that by the time the movie does end, when you realize how long it took you to tune in to the rhythm, you also realize that it was worth it.

after he demands that none of this partners would be hurt by testimony of his. From then on, his life becomes an ever-escalating nightmare. As the investigation moves forward, with his life and his family in danger, it takes up wider and wider circles until he has destroyed all his friends and is on the verge of being tried himself. You realize how futile the entire investigation was, due to the masterful work of director Sidney Lumet, who also co-wrote the script. He manipulates our sympathies in several ways -- as Ciello moves into higher and higher investigations, the prosecutors that he deals with become more and more contemptible. In fact, they are the real villains of the story -- they disrupt the usual give-and-take game of the street, where a person's word and knowing the right people is everything. I think that Lumet has more respect for the Mafia underlings and junkies here than the prosecutors manipulating Ciello, and it shows in the film.

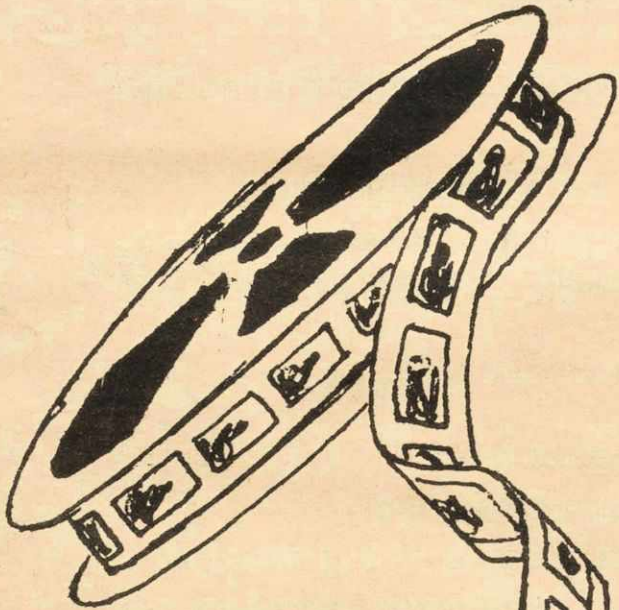
Lumet also makes the des-

truction of Ciello's friends more nervous tension at times, you expect him to blow up at any second and vanish in a puff of sheer intensity. This, although it's right for the movie, makes it harder for us to relate to him. Lumet also doesn't use the traditional ploy of showing a lovely family life -- his life with his family is fairly brushed over. This annoyed me at first, and still does to an extent (the difficulty that I had in relating to the characters and story), but now I see why it was done. What isn't done by compromising his story, Lumet does by cumulative effect -- we stay focused on one character for so long that we must inevitably become emotionally involved.

The extent to which this was handled well was demonstrated at the film's end, when I was surprised as hell to find myself moved by what was going on. In following the nightmare spiral downwards for so long, you are numbed by it -- as he is -- and it is then that the movie has reached you. The more I think about it, the more I admire the

style and effect that Lumet has achieved. In these thrill-a-minute movie times I have no idea how this will go over, as it isn't the kind of movie to jump

out at you for entertainment with a capital E, but I hope it'll get the recognition it deserves. It overcame my initial hedging, and it could win you over too.



JORDAN/BO.

Transpose

way that Williams shakes with seemingly useless by not showing any of the SIU's criminal behavior except for giving heroin to informers, who are pathetic, childish folk that "break your heart" as Ciello says. Everything drives relentlessly towards the end in the pursuit of the film's message of the impossibility of justice. Therein lies the film at its most difficult. Lumet offers no easy way

for us to identify with the characters and story, least of all not in the way that Daniel Ciello is portrayed by Treat Williams. Williams gives what is likely the performance of his life as he shows a tortured man; tortured by his conscience, by fear, by panic as his entire life disintegrates in front of him. But this is not the flamboyant screaming torture of an Al Pacino (as in Lumet's **Dog Day Afternoon**), it is an internal conflict -- implosive rather than explosive. The

The movie questions the whole idea of justice to an extent in the way it handles the policeman's story. Daniel Ciello (Treat Williams) is a cop at the top of the heap at the movie's beginning -- his is one of a select squad, the SIU, who are called "princes of the city" because of their remarkable records and are virtually unchecked by the department. His conscience causes him to work undercover for a government investigation of corruption, but he only agrees to it

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Correction

In the Gazette's October 8 issue, in the article "The Second Coming of Moonbuzz", Gerry Potts was incorrectly reported as the harp player for the Water Street Blues Band. Joe Murphy is the correct name. Also, Moonbuzz band members have played in other groups including "Nobody's Heroes", not "Nobody's Here". The Gazette apologizes for these errors.

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