

arts

Timothy Hutton and Amanda Plummer in a scene from Sidney Lumet's latest film, *Daniel*.

Rosenbergs go Hollywood

By RICHARD GOTLIB

As director Sidney Lumet would have it, his latest film *Daniel* is one that is supposed to convey "the cost extracted between parents and children" as a result of parental passions. Lumet tries to wring this theme out of the Hollywoodized version of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg's trial and execution as spies passing atomic secrets to the Russians in 1953.

Based on an E.L. Doctorow novel and the author's own screenplay, the fictionally-veneered Rosenberg story is told from the point of view of Daniel, the son of Paul and Rochelle Isaacson (the film's incarnation of the Rosenbergs).

The film unwinds through two separate story lines, that of Paul and Rochelle Isaacson; their life, politics, and government prosecution, and secondly through the scenes of Daniel, an apolitical hippie graduate student (Timothy Hutton) investigating the annals of his family's history in order to find himself.

The problem with the film is that there is no proper interface between these two stories. A definite imbalance in both pace and style permeates the film and separates the two plots.

The segments of the film about Paul and Rochelle are compelling. Mandy Patinkin (the Jewish father cum film director in *Ragtime*) and Lindsay Crouse (Treat Williams' wife in *Prince of the City*) display powerful performances as the Rosenberg characters.

Starting off as young, idealistic left-wingers spouting Communist dogma in the 1930s and '40s, the film takes these characters into the post-war era of Communist paranoia. Paul and Rochelle are ingested by 'witch-hunting' and charged with passing atomic secrets to the Russians.

Daniel and his sister, children in these segments, witness the Communist prattling, their father's arrest, and their parents on death row. The impossible quest that Daniel undertakes is to uncover the facts about his parents to see if they were actually spies guilty of the charges or merely scapegoats.

The Rosenberg story line on its own makes quite a chilling tale which could stand independently. The scenes with the adult Daniel searching for the truth behind his parents' case cannot stand on its own. The characterizations do not mesh well between Daniel the child and the man, and the dramatic

structure of the scenes with Hutton is episodic, without sufficient plot or tension to really maintain interest as does the other storyline.

The acting in the younger Paul and Rochelle segments is uniformly strong and includes good performances by the young children who play Daniel and his sister, and from Ed Asner as the Isaacson's lawyer. In the Hutton segments, the acting is uneven, Hutton aside. Amanda Plummer as Daniel's sister is still intensely playing Agnes of God but here *sans* nun's habit, and everyone else is quite wooden.

The overwhelming feeling in Daniel is bleakness

Timothy Hutton, as Daniel, brings life to a character which the movie renders full of sound and fury but signifies very little. Daniel is initially surrounded by a nauseatingly stereotypical family unit: one searching-for-fulfillment-through-acid-god-and-now-political revolution, unbalanced sister (Amanda Plummer); one liberal-minded, cardigan-clad foster father trying to mediate a tranquil dining room dinner amidst a vacuous sociopolitical logomachy between Daniel and his sibling; one foster mother wishing everyone would calm down and dine socially; and one cow-eyed air-headed spouse (Daniel's) over

whose head the whole scene is whizzing. This scene supposedly establishes all the requisite character traits and background of the players which the rest of the film will investigate. However, the uncomfortable intellectual burlesque that this scene turns into makes it very difficult to engage the audience's sympathy. In a few scenes, with the bolstering effect of the 'flashback' Rosenberg story segments Daniel is able to achieve a poignant moment or two.

The overwhelming feeling one gets after viewing *Daniel* is bleakness. The film is shot with a very harsh, cold light that enhances the stark nature of the Rosenberg story. Lumet tries to give the film an upbeat ending when Daniel realizes the futility of his quest and "returns to life" by attending peace rallies of the 1960s.

At a press conference in Toronto to promote the film, Sidney Lumet elucidated on his story-telling techniques which underlie the basic problem with *Daniel*. In trying to thread the thematic content between the two alternating story segments, Lumet is not "even going to put signposts" in the film. What's missing then is the cause and effect relationship of what Daniel does on screen and what he's thinking and feeling. The director wants "the audience to do half the work" which is quite difficult when Lumet — whose filmmaking success and acumen have most successfully been in melodrama (*The Verdict*, *Prince of the City*, *Network*) — is so calculatedly trying to be profound.

Weird poetry

By NIGEL TURNER

It began with weird saxophones, and although it was held in Winters College, music had nothing to do with it. It was the first of this year's poetry recitals held in the senior common room on Tuesday.

Three York students recited some of their work in an hour-packed poetry session. The three were Ross Milliken, Margaret Christakos, and Michael Trussler, all fourth-year poetry workshop students in the Creative Writing program.

Trussler began the reading with a followed with a couple of poems addressed to his buddy, a pet parakeet named George. One or two poems which he admitted were

unfinished seemed choppy, almost prosaic. But for the most part the writings fell beautifully into the mood set by the saxophones.

The second speaker, Christakos, who also organized the event, read several surrealistic poems dominated by moon imagery. Her delivery brought the flow of her poems to life.

The final writer, Milliken, was the only predominantly humorous poet. Even his introduction to each work secured laughs from the audience. He ended his session with a short story titled "Cathy," a conversational piece between two people in a bar.

The musical introduction was provided by Gerry Barwin and Richard Underhill, saxophone, and John Pennyfather, drums.

Sun Ra:

Patrons at Larry's Hideaway experience the ninth dimension

By RICHARD UNDERHILL

Metro Toronto police were summoned to Larry's Hideaway Thursday night to investigate rumors of an alien sighting in the area. Panic and mass hysteria was avoided, however, when officials learned that witnesses had merely encountered Sun Ra and his Ninth Dimensional Cosmic Arkestra, who were performing at the club.

Relatively unknown outside of the "jazz underground," Sun Ra (who claims to be from Saturn) has led his Arkestra of collective improvisers for more than 25 years and many of his original sidemen—saxophonists John Gilmore and Marshall Allen for example—still perform with the group. Demonstrating incredible dedication—most of the Arkestra live with Sun Ra in a Philadelphia commune where they have ample space/time to rehearse and experiment collectively.

Although almost impossible to categorize, Sun Ra's music draws on many styles, from the early swing of the 1930s and '40s (he was an arranger for the classic New York "jump" band of Fletcher Henderson), to the synthesized music of the 1980s; from the aniphonal chanting of African tribal ritual, to the far out sounds of free jazz.

In general, the Arkestra functions as an improvising show band under the strict control of Sun Ra, who composes most of the group's structured material and leads the band into free jazz and cosmic music.

The cavernous Larry's was jammed with Sun Ra supporters. Finding a seat with sightlines (a necessity at an Arkestra performance) was a perilous task even an hour before showtime. No less perilous, however, was the arrangement of instruments on the small stage. Clusters of saxophones and other woodwinds (bass clarinet, bassoon, oboe, flute, and a Sun-Ra-did-it-first lyricon-like instrument) jostled for position amidst stacks of percussion instruments ranging from timbales to cow bells. Sun Ra's electric keyboards and an enormous African talking drum framed the cluttered stage, leaving very little room for the performers (who numbered about 18).

When the band appeared, costumed to resemble the court musicians of a 21st Century Tutankhamun, they set up a polyhythmic beat featuring the kora (a West African

harp) that transformed the scene into a moving mosaic of color. With the poise of a cosmic guru, Sun Ra waddled onto the stage with vocalist June Tyson, and sang a number of cryptic futuristic poems to the dense percussion background.

The pieces, with titles such as "1984," "Nuclear War," and "Space is the Place" were sung in call and response style, with Sun Ra making himself out to be a prophet (I'm Big Brother's little brother/You better be good to me!) and the band shouting their approval.

Dressed in flowing robes and head beads, Sun Ra and Tyson resembled the king and queen of some exotic galactic tribe. Several times throughout the show they were joined by an elaborately attired dancer who threw himself about in marionette fashion. In a truly visual spectacle, the band also got into the act and many times put down their instruments to dance in a procession across the stage.

The first set ended with a foray into the conventional jazz repertoire, with near-parodies of such standards as "The Days of Wine and Roses," and "Sometimes I'm Happy." Although a nice change from the eclectic tunes that had dominated the first half of the set, it seemed that Sun Ra was watering down his performance in order to appease the more conservative types in the audience.

The second set blasted off encouragingly with a rousing piece of free-jazz. But then the band reverted to the standard repertoire once again, throwing in a few cryptic poems for variety.

The highlight of the show came late in the evening as alto-saxophonist Marshall Allen played an unbelievable avant-garde rendition of "Cocktails for Two." Equivalent in motion—but not in function—to running a hand down a piano, Allen "strummed" his sax and managed to produce some amazing glissando shouts with his horn. It wasn't mainstream, but he interpreted the ballad beautifully.

Unfortunately, Sun Ra held the reins a little too tightly during the concert—had he given his musicians a little more freedom, the evening would have been much more satisfying. As it was, the many tonal colors of the Chameleon-like Arkestra were not properly exploited, and the audience had to settle for far too many jazz standards from a man of Sun Ra's cosmic stature.



Ross Milliken(left) at the first installment of Winters' poetry series