

# Dog Day Afternoon - first rate

by Ron Norman

Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon*, with a frequently hilarious, but eventually downright saddening dialogue, some slickly edited, highly polished camera work, and a performance by Al Pacino which is nothing less than super, has been drawing crowds to the Paramount on Barrington and delighting them with some long sought after first-rate entertainment.

Lumet works with a screenplay which has a strikingly similar framework to *Serpico* — an earlier effort on which he collaborated with Pacino (it was shown just last weekend in SUB). As with *Serpico*, *Dog Day Afternoon* centers on a solitary, intense protagonist. Equally similar to *Serpico* is "Afternoon's" cinematic delineation of the lone individual who has been pressured into combating an overpowering system, a system which even in its unwieldy, inveterate incompetence proves to be too awesome and unyielding. The outstanding difference between the two movies is of course in the role of the lone protagonist. In *Serpico* Pacino played an off-beat cop; in "Afternoon" he plays an off-beat bank robber.

The film opens with a bouncy four or five minute montage of New York City. Not only is the Brooklyn setting for the bank robbery firmly established, but the up-beat montage, backed by music from one of rocker Elton John's better numbers — *Amoreena* (from *Tumbleweed Connection*), charges the movie with an energy which then slowly unwinds as the action progresses. The bank robbers — Sonny (Al Pacino), and his two accomplices Sal (John Cazale) and Stevie — are first viewed as just another part of a typical Brooklyn street scene. While the camera cuts to a closer shot of the parked car in which the three sit, Sonny reaches forward, and in a nice filmic bit which is indicative of Lumet's slickness, clicks off the car radio. At the same time the Elton John song clicks off and the action begins.

Almost immediately the comic tone is introduced and developed. Though the picture might have grown into a light-hearted romp with a trio of Brooklyn bank robbers, an underlying coldness in the action succeeds in offsetting the farcical scenes and keeps the audience from anything more than sporadic spasms of laughter. This tension between comedy and looming tragedy, and later as the film progresses, between farce and despondency, is one of the finest elements in the film. Lumet manages to sustain this tension (a very tricky thing indeed) and the

film works itself out quite nicely. As Sonny's perfectly planned, highly systematized, half-hour bank robbery turns into a humerous farce and then breaks down into ever-darkening despondency, Lumet inserts a number of kinks into the basic plot — Sonny's incredible tight-faced mother, his bitchy wife, his homosexual lover, and a television interview which glares of yellow journalism.

As Sonny, Al Pacino carries the role off so well that he will most certainly receive an Academy nomination. Since the whole movie actually centers on Sonny, Pacino has to be strong enough to sustain interest for two hours. He does. His genuine intensity marks a major difference from his much more

controlled, more detached role in *Serpico*. In "Afternoon" he manifests a character who is not only off-beat, but at times near to flipping out. The alternation between the fast-talking and the slow-talking Sonny, the periodic ingenuity and simpleness, the wavering from one quirky position to another sets up Sonny's unbalanced character. The introduction of particular slices of his personal life, his wacky mother, his homosexual marriage to a lover named Leon (probably the saddest part of the movie) who cannot get the sex change operation, and subsequently attempts suicide, and his nagging mountain of a wife, all help to move the audience from an acceptance and a strong awe of

Sonny to simple pity for him.

When the lights go out in the bank and the machine-like FBI agents assume control from the New York Police, the mood drastically changes and Sonny's outcome is very nearly fated. The farcical scenes suddenly grow fewer and the intensity of the strained emotions increases. One quickly realizes that Sonny will be lucky to escape with his life. The humour now becomes nervous laughter. Sonny becomes more pitiful. The final sequence, alternating between the shot from the helicopter and the shot from the long procession of cars leading to the airport, presents a nice visual tension.

John Cazale as Sonny's limp-  
Cont'd on pg. 12

# Rampant and deluxe smut

You'll Eat It Up!

Sorry. Well not really. You may have to apologize for the Madhouse Theater of London, but I'm sure not about to. Since you all understood the last article, (including the Gazette Staff), Winter Carnival will add a bit more about these hilarious lunatics. For an insight they may include such acts as:

The wildest stunt in "The Wild Stunt Show" currently being performed by the Madhouse Company of London, involves the defying propulsion of a human wreck from a cannon made out of three galvanized ash cans. The cannon is about nine feet long. Since the ceiling is a shade over dungeon height, with no other visible outlet beyond blasting up the stairwell or through the room's four walls, I think you can imagine the wildness of the stunt, particularly when I add that the audience is asked to string a net two inches above their heads as a catch-all for the soon-to-emerge wreck.

The Madhouse Company lives up to its name. As a ditzzy, slapstick revue, it features six rude lunatics who perform in the knock-down, drag-out tradition of "El Grande de Coca Cola" and the Monty Python Circus. It's insanely funny, so funny in places that whatever incipient offense lurks in your soul is driven out with the force of an exuberant, if uninvited, exorcist. What I'm getting at is that, in Madhouse's mysterious madcappery, you're cleansed by the dirt.

Item: before the revue begins a grizzled, drooling, loinclothed Wild Man of Borneo stalks through the

cramped audience looking for a lady to rape. He's kept in tow, part of the time, by a warden, but when the warden wanders off the Wild Man actually starts to mount whomever strikes his grunting fancy (and the whomever is any lady unable to stop laughing).

Despite its rampant acatology and deluxe smut, "The Wild Stunt

Show" is good-natured fun and, in some sense, an outgrowth of the lack of restrictions championed by comedian Lenny Bruce. Sure it's outrageous, but it's also liberating.

That just about raps it up and we'll see you there. Then you know who writes these stupid looney articles.



The Madhouse Theater of London will entertain (?) at Dal's Winter Carnival.

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