

New Hollywood: American 70s

Dog Day Afternoon 1975

Friday, December 4 - Thursday, December 10, 2009



Film Information

Directed by
Sidney Lumet

Language
English

Running Time
125 minutes

Film Notes

Born in 1924, Sidney Lumet isn't the prototypical New Hollywood director, having made his debut film—12 ANGRY MEN (1957)—when Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, and Peter Bogdanovich were all still in their teens. His was not the case of a young filmmaker breaking through the fortress of old Hollywood. But with an extraordinary mid-1970s trifecta—SERPICO (1973), DOG DAY AFTERNOON (1975), and NETWORK (1976)—Lumet reflected the era's provocative spirit as much as any other filmmaker. At the center of all three of those films are fiercely urgent, go-for-broke performances that, propelled by Lumet's technical mastery and some gentle manipulation (more about that in a moment), practically leap from the screen.

Al Pacino received his breakthrough as Michael Corleone in Coppola's GODFATHER films, but his portrayal of Sonny Wortzik in DOG DAY AFTERNOON may be his finest: a sublime combination of the actor at his most reserved and animated. The two halves come together in an especially powerful sequence in which Wortzik has back-to-back phone conversations with his wife and his would-be lover. "The thing about Al is he also has this purity mixed with this incredibly undeniable anger," Lumet told Charlie Rose in a 1995 interview. "He's so dangerous up there on screen. Even in a moment of complete vulnerability, you know you have a feeling

where he could turn around and just do something..."

"The story was they were in that bank for nine hours," Lumet continued, speaking specifically of the phone scene. "I just wanted [Pacino] in a state of exhaustion beyond. Now, that state of exhaustion does another thing, it opens up emotions. ... when we're tired, we weep more easily, we laugh more easily, we [get angry more easily]."

Lumet probably had everything he needed from Pacino's first shot at the scene—a long, demanding take that left the actor drained. But, hoping to push him a little further over the edge, the director called for a second. "When he finished that second take, he literally didn't know where he was," Lumet recalled. "We talked about it afterward, and he didn't even know he did a second take."

—Casey



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“I’m robbing a bank because they got money here. That’s why I’m robbing it.”

More Information

Screenplay by

Frank Pierson

Featuring

Al Pacino
John Cazale
Charles Durning
Chris Sarandon
Sully Boyar
Penelope Allen
James Broderick
Carol Kane

Cinematography by

Victor J. Kemper

Film Editing by

Dede Allen

Country of Origin

USA

“Camera work is principally composed of what the camera is contributing and what it is doing that the actor is not doing. It’s all got to add up to a cohesive whole. For example, if the actor needs enormous freedom for a scene, you work it out stylistically in advance to put that freedom the actor needs to work for you visually. I know in *DOG DAY AFTERNOON*, because I had worked with Al [Pacino] before on *SERPICO*, that playing a character like that demanded mobility on my part. I integrated that into the style of the movie, and it made a great deal of difference. I had wheelchairs. I had rollerskates. Anything that was necessary to move the camera. Rather than tell Al to slow down I’d rather put the cameramen on rollerskates and have them pulled. Then make that part of the style of the movies. So the camera movement in this thoroughly naturalistic movie makes it look like it’s actually happening right then and there. It looks like it was shot by television cameramen, fighting their way through crowds, and so on. Everything’s got to work toward the same objective.”

—**Sidney Lumet, from the book
Sidney Lumet: Interviews**

Also Recommended by Sidney Lumet

12 Angry Men 1957
Long Day’s Journey Into Night 1962
Serpico 1973
Murder on the Orient Express 1974
Network 1976
The Verdict 1982
Running on Empty 1988
Before the Devil Knows You’re Dead 2007