

Great Directors: Cassavetes

Mikey and Nicky 1976

Friday, March 20 - Thursday, March 26, 2009



Film Information

Directed by
Elaine May

Language
English

Running Time
119 minutes

Film Notes

MIKEY AND NICKY was released in 1976 but really didn't receive its just attention until more than a decade later, following John Cassavetes' death in 1989, and then another 15 years later with a long-overdue DVD release. As *The New York Times* wrote on that occasion in 2004, "When the film opened in New York in December 1976, it sank quickly out of sight and has remained for the last 28 years a legend among those lucky enough to see it at its periodic revivals."

Why did it remain underground for so long? Various reports point to Paramount giving the film an at best perfunctory release following a long and drawn out editing process by director Elaine May. And why was the editing process so long and drawn out? Well, May had quite a bit of film to sort through—by some accounts, more than twice as much used for *GONE WITH THE WIND*. While that's tough to prove, the manner with which MIKEY AND NICKY was shot makes it plausible: three cameras, left to run for great lengths of time as Cassavetes and co-star Peter Falk improvised much of their dialogue. For that reason, many observers have compared the style of MIKEY AND NICKY to Cassavetes' own films, a comparison rooted in misconception: despite all appearances to

the contrary, Cassavetes' films, with the exception of *SHADOWS* and a handful of scenes here and there, were never so thoroughly improvised.

With a mountain of footage to pare down, May crafted a drama/thriller/tragedy clocking in at less than two hours—certainly no small accomplishment. She also delivered the film to Paramount a year late, this after hiding the negative so the studio couldn't seize it from her [see the reverse side for more about that]. Due in part to the subsequent fallout, May didn't direct for another ten years, and then it was a project so problematic (and cruelly received by the critics) that the troubles surrounding MIKEY AND NICKY seemed positively dreamlike by comparison: *ISHTAR* (1987).

—Casey



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More Information

Screenplay by
Elaine May

Featuring
Peter Falk
John Cassavetes
Ned Beatty
Rose Arrick
Carol Grace
William Hickey
Sanford Meisner
Joyce Van Patten
M. Emmet Walsh

Cinematography by
Bernie Abramson
Lucien Ballard
Victor J. Kemper

Original Music by
John Strauss

Film Editing by
John Carter
Sheldon Kahn

Country of Origin
USA

“Really, this is true [that she hid the film negative from Paramount]. The studio changed heads. The guy who was in charge, Frank Yablans, and a new guy, Barry Diller, came in the middle, and he thought it was a comedy. But we screened it and it wasn’t. And they stopped it. They pulled. We were two-thirds done. I don’t even know how we finished. I once told John Cassavetes he’d have to actually shoot [the end], because he was so wonderful with the camera. We had no one. It was really a very difficult thing to do because it wasn’t that the studio heads involved really didn’t like each other. They were really not happy with this movie because it was not a comedy.”

—Elaine May, 2006

Also Recommended with John Cassavetes

- The Killers 1946
- The Dirty Dozen 1967
- Rosemary’s Baby 1968
- Husbands 1970
- Opening Night 1976
- Love Streams 1984