



## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

# Heat

### **SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

After a journey into the 18th-century wilderness for *The Last of the Mohicans*, Michael Mann returns to the urban terrain of his television series *Miami Vice* and *Crime Story* and his features *Manhunter* and *Thief* with a film which can be read as a compendium of his work to date. Like James Caan's safe-cracker, Frank, in 1981's *Thief*, Neil McCauley is single-mindedly devoted to his profession ('What are you?' Hanna asks him, 'A monk?'), and only loses control of his own destiny when he tries to buy himself what Hanna, when he confronts him in the coffee shop, dismisses as 'a regular-type life'. Vincent Hanna, meanwhile, is a variation on William Petersen's Will Graham from *Manhunter* in his talent for putting himself in the shoes of his prey and seeing what they see, and in the way this leaves him closer to those he is pursuing than those he is protecting.

In one breathtaking sequence in *Heat* which evokes the voyeuristic, hall-of-mirrors feel of *Manhunter*, Hanna and his men watch McCauley's crew scouting out a refinery. When they have gone, Hanna stands exactly where they stood, trying to guess what they were looking at – before realising that they were looking at him, and that McCauley has now lured him into the open. The camera then pulls back to show McCauley taking his picture. Hanna can ultimately catch McCauley because they are just alike (Mann suggests this early on with near identical shots of Hanna picking up his gun from the table before he goes to work, and McCauley putting his down when he gets home). Both have their matching crews, and the presence of Wes Studi, the formidable Magua from *The Last of the Mohicans*, as Hanna's right-hand man Casals, alerts us to *Heat*'s echo of that film, as the bands of modern-day Mohicans and Hurons track each other across the jungle that is Los Angeles.

Mann reinvents LA here with the same visionary gaze he turned on Miami in *Miami Vice*, Las Vegas in *Crime Story* and Atlanta in *Manhunter*. From the 'dead-tech, post-modernist' home where Hanna's marriage falls apart, to McCauley's beach-side glass box, bathed in blue light (just like Graham's home in *Manhunter*), to the red-and-white-checked concrete cubes by the runway where McCauley dies, there's not a boring building in the film: Mann is the best director of architecture since Antonioni. In fact, few filmmakers at work today can rival Mann's control of every detail of the filmmaking process – perhaps this is why his films are so infrequent – from the fluent but unostentatious camera movements (worthy, as David Thomson has pointed out, of Max Ophuls), to the precise, almost David Mamet-like dialogue, to the expertly chosen soundtrack, which manages to make artists as diverse as Moby and György Ligeti sound like they belong on the same record.

David Thomson has singled out another Mann trademark, his peerless use of vivid supporting players, and *Heat* certainly doesn't disappoint in this respect. Mann discovers compelling new sides of Jon Voight (Nate, who could be Jack Palance's younger brother), Val Kilmer (blond, ponytailed, puffy-faced and petulant as the safe-cracker Shiherlis) and Tom Sizemore, typecast as a cartoon psychopath in the likes of *Natural Born Killers* and *Devil in a Blue Dress*, but here reinvented as the solid, grey-haired foot soldier, Cheritto. Tom Noonan, the serial killer from *Manhunter*, has a great cameo, bearded like an orthodox priest, as the source who tips McCauley off about the bank job, while Ted Levine – the killer in *Manhunter*'s de facto sequel, *The Silence of the Lambs*, and a veteran of *Crime Story* – turns up balding and moustachioed as one of Hanna's men. Mann also

takes the trouble to populate his man's world with interesting women: Diane Venora, barely glimpsed since *Bird*, as Justine Hanna; Natalie Portman of *Léon* as her suicidal daughter; Ashley Judd, finally fulfilling the promise of *Ruby in Paradise*, as Charlene Shiherlis. Only *NYPD Blue*'s Amy Brenneman, in the pivotal role of Eady, fails to make much of an impression.

The real casting coup, of course, lies in the first pairing of De Niro and Pacino (they were father and son in *The Godfather Part II*, but never shared a scene). The first half of *Heat* plays absorbingly off the mounting tension about when the two will meet. Hanna first sees McCauley's Satanic image through a heat-vision viewfinder while staking out the metal depository; McCauley gets his look at Hanna through a telephoto lens. When it finally arrives, two hours in, their single scene together (bar the final shootout) is all the more highly charged for the banality of the setting, in a coffee shop. Rewardingly, the confrontation seems to have the same significance for the actors as it does for the characters: two driven professionals, frequently compared to each other and both at the peak of their powers, finally get the chance to size each other up at close range. In the same way that McCauley and Hanna's duel inspires each to greater feats of ingenuity, so the actors bring out the best in each other. Pacino is on edge here, with an alarming habit of suddenly shouting his words, but such is his authority that he makes it seem like the character's mannerism rather than the actor's; Hanna is not the loose cannon of cop-movie cliché, but a man who *pretends* to be when he needs to intimidate people, whether an informer or his wife's lover. De Niro, meanwhile, rises to the challenge with his most compelling work since *The King of Comedy*. Thankfully free of tics, his McCauley is so ruthlessly controlled that he barely moves his head; his eyes do all the work. If *Heat* were a play, you could imagine De Niro and Pacino swopping the roles every night, like Olivier and Richardson in *Othello*.

'All I am is what I'm going after,' says Hanna near the end of his quest, a motto that could serve as well for McCauley, or for any of Mann's protagonists. In Mann's universe, as in that of Howard Hawks, professionalism is all that counts; but, unlike Hawks, Mann shows the cost of such a code in widows and wrecked marriages. In fact, for a cop movie, *Heat* seems unusually suffused with an awareness of death. Hanna's wife Justine, who, like her husband, always wears black, keeps telling him that he is walking dead through life. When McCauley and Hanna meet, they compare their dreams – and both have been dreaming of death, of time running out. (For Mann and his leads, all into their 50s, this seems to carry a real weight.) And, in the film's only superfluous scene, Waingro announces himself as the Grim Reaper before murdering a prostitute – leaving Hanna, who, in his wife's haunting words 'lives among the remains of dead people', to pick up the pieces.

Of all the directors in America today who are set on keeping *film noir* alive, Mann seems the most willing to invest the genre with real characters and morality, and the most reluctant to fall back on cliché. (Which doesn't mean he fails to deliver on the set pieces: the bank robbery here, which spirals into a pitched battle on the streets of downtown LA that's as ferocious as anything in *The Last of the Mohicans*, will surely stand as one of the great failed-heist sequences.) For those who cherish *Thief*, *Manhunter* and *Mohicans*, and for those who believe that Martin Scorsese's post *King of Comedy* output has slipped into a sort of flashy self-parody identified by Gilbert Adair as 'Scorsese', as in journalese or legalese, *Heat*, placed by the accident of its British release schedule within a month of *Casino*, another, more vigorously hyped three-hour De Niro crime story, only serves to bolster the case for Michael Mann as the key American auteur of the last ten years.

**John Wrathall, *Sight and Sound*, February 1996**

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## HEAT

*Director:* Michael Mann  
*©:* Monarchy Enterprises B.V.  
*©/Presented in association with:* Regency Entertainment (USA) Inc  
*Production Company:* Forward Pass Productions  
*In association with:* Regency Enterprises  
*Presented by:* Warner Bros.  
*Executive Producers:* Arnon Milchan, Pieter Jan Brugge  
*Produced by:* Michael Mann, Art Linson  
*Associate Producers:* Kathleen M. Shea, Gusmano Cesaretti  
*Unit Production Manager:* Christopher Cronyn  
*Production Accountant:* Cheryl A. Stone  
*Location Managers:* Janice Polley, Lori Balton  
*Post-production Supervisors:* Kathy Virkler, Mark Stevens  
*Assistant to Michael Mann:* Carlo Bernard  
*2nd Unit Director:* Ami Canaan Mann  
*1st Assistant Director:* Michael Waxman  
*2nd Assistant Director:* Douglas S. Ornstein  
*Script Supervisor:* Cate Hardman  
 *Casting:* Bonnie Timmermann  
*Written by:* Michael Mann  
*Director of Photography:* Dante Spinotti  
*Camera Operator:* Gary Jay  
*Steadicam Operator:* James Muro  
*1st Assistant Camera:* Duane 'DC' Manwiller, Chris Moseley  
*Loader:* James Apted  
*Key Grip:* W.C. 'Chunky' Huse  
*Still Photography:* Frank Connor  
*Visual Effects Supervisor:* Neil Krepela  
*Digital Compositing:* Pacific Title Digital  
*Special Effects Co-ordinator:* Terry D. Frazee  
*Edited by:* Dov Hoenig, Pasquale Buba, William Goldenberg, Tom Rolf  
*Production Designer:* Neil Spisak  
*Art Director:* Marjorie Stone McShirley  
*Art Department Co-ordinator:* L. Oscar A. Mazzola  
*Assistant Art Director:* Dianne Wager  
*Set Designers:* Robert Fectman, Steven Schwartz, Paul Sonski, Annie H. Ahrens  
*Illustrator:* Sean Hargreaves  
*Storyboard Artist:* Jeff Balsmeyer  
*Property Master:* Charles Stewart  
*Construction Co-ordinator:* Anthony Lattanzio  
*Costume Designer:* Deborah L. Scott  
*Assistant Costume Designer:* David Levey  
*Al Pacino's Costumer:* Joseph T. Mastrolia  
*Robert De Niro's Costumer:* Marsha Bozeman  
*Val Kilmer's Costumer:* Brenda Donoho  
*Key Make-up Artist:* John Caglione Jr  
*Make-up Artist/Tattoo Designer:* Ken Diaz  
*Key Hairstylist:* Vera Mitchell  
*Design/Animation of Main Title Sequence:* Research Arts  
*Titles/Opticals:* Pacific Title  
*Colour Timer:* David Orr  
*Music Composed by:* Elliot Goldenthal  
*Music Score Performances:* The Kronos Quartet  
*Conducted by:* Jonathan Sheffer, Stephen Mercurio  
*Score Recorded/Mixed by:* Stephen McLaughlin, Joel Iwataki  
*Production Sound Mixer:* Lee Orloff  
*Boom Operator:* Nicholas R. Allen  
*Re-recording Mixers:* Chris Jenkins, Andy Nelson, Ron Bartlett, Anna Behlmer, Mark Smith, John Arrias  
*Supervising Sound Editors:* Per Hallberg, Larry Kemp  
*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Joel Kramer  
*Technical Advisers:* Charles Adamsom, Tom Elfmont, Gil Parra, Rey Verdugo

## Cast

Al Pacino (*Vincent Hanna*)  
Robert De Niro (*Neil McCauley*)  
Val Kilmer (*Chris Shiherlis*)  
Tom Sizemore (*Michael Cheritto*)  
Diane Venora (*Justine*)  
Amy Brenneman (*Eady*)  
Dennis Haysbert (*Donald Breedan*)  
Ashley Judd (*Charlene Shiherlis*)  
Mykel T. Williamson (*Sergeant Drucker*)  
Wes Studi (*Casals*)  
Ted Levine (*Danny Bosko*)  
William Fichtner (*Roger Van Zant*)  
Natalie Portman (*Lauren Gustafson, Justine's daughter*)  
Tom Noonan (*Kelso*)  
Kevin Gage (*Waingro*)  
Hank Azaria (*Alan Marciano*)  
Susan Traylor (*Elaine Cheritto*)  
Kim Staunton (*Lillian*)  
Jon Voight (*Nate*)  
Danny Trejo (*Trejo*)  
Henry Rollins (*Hugh Benny*)  
Jerry Trimble (*Schwartz*)  
Marty Ferrero (*construction clerk*)  
Ricky Harris (*Albert Torena*)  
Tone Loc (*Richard Torena*)  
Begonya Plaza (*Anna Trejo*)  
Hazelle Goodman (*hooker's mother*)  
Ray Buktenica (*Timmons*)  
Jeremy Piven (*Doctor Bob*)  
Xander Berkeley (*Ralph*)  
Rick Avery (*armoured guard 2*)  
Brad Baldrige (*children's hospital doctor*)  
Andrew Camuccio, Brian Camuccio (*Dominick*)  
Max Daniels (*shooter at drive-in*)  
Vince Deadrick Jr (*driver at drive-in*)  
Charles Duke (*cop 5*)  
Thomas Elfmont (*desk clerk cop*)  
Kenny Endoso (*bartender*)  
Kimberly Flynn (*Casals' date*)  
Steven Ford (*Officer Bruce*)  
Farrah Forke (*Claudia*)  
Hannes Fritsch (*Miracle Mile bartender*)  
Amanda Graves (*Linda Cheritto*)  
Emily Graves (*Anita Cheritto*)  
Niki Harris (*Marcia Drucker*)  
Ted Harvey (*detective 2*)  
Patricia Healy (*Bosko's date*)  
Paul Herman (*Sergeant Heinz*)  
Cindy Katz (*Rachel*)  
Brian Libby (*Captain Jackson*)  
Bill McIntosh (*armoured guard 1*)  
Dan Martin (*Harry Dieter*)  
Rick Marzan (*basketball player*)  
Terry Miller (*children's hospital nurse*)  
Paul Moyer (*news anchorman*)  
Daniel O'Haco (*detective 1*)  
Mario Roberts (*bank guard 1*)  
Phillip Robinson (*Alphonse*)  
Thomas Rosales (*armoured truck driver*)  
Rainell Saunders (*dead hooker*)  
Kai Soremekun (*prostitute*)  
Rey Verdugo (*Vegas cop*)  
Wendy L. Walsh (*news anchorman*)  
Yvonne Zima (*hostage girl*)

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171 mins

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