



EVENTS

# Summer of Sam

+ intro by Spike Lee

## A contemporary review

*Summer of Sam*, set in New York during the heatwave of 1977 when serial killer David Berkowitz was terrorising the city, has been largely misrepresented by the press. A *New York Times* article in June quoted relatives of Berkowitz's victims railing against its director Spike Lee. 'He feels that murder is entertainment,' said one. Berkowitz himself, now serving six consecutive life sentences, expressed his disappointment that the film was raking up 'what is best forgotten.'

Berkowitz, however, is only a minor player in the movie he helped inspire: *Summer of Sam* could just as well have been called *Summer of Reggie* (while Berkowitz was on his killing spree, baseball player Reggie Jackson helped the Yankees win the World Series) or *Scenes from an Italian-American Marriage*. Lee's real interest is in the relationships between members of a close-knit neighbourhood in the Bronx. With tensions aggravated by the sweaty weather and the fear of a serial killer in their midst, it's a community which is close to boiling point – similar to the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighbourhood in *Do the Right Thing*. Lee captures brilliantly the creeping sense of paranoia that affected the city and the strange, macabre thrill of having its own serial killer. (To avoid Sam, who reportedly favours brunettes, women begin dying their hair blond or wearing wigs.) With such craziness in the air, it doesn't even seem incongruous when the killer begins to think a black Labrador is talking to him, enjoining him to 'kill, kill, kill.'

The film begins and ends with veteran journalist Jimmy Breslin speaking directly to camera about 'the summer of Sam'. His presence at once evokes the metropolis we know from Weegee photographs and gritty cop dramas, and creates a strange kind of nostalgia. In *Summer of Sam*, as in Martin Scorsese's *Bringing Out the Dead* (set in the early 90s), we're seeing a New York which no longer exists. Mayor Giuliani may have cleaned up crime (homicides are now at their lowest since 1961, Breslin tells us) but he has also taken the heart out of the city. But *Summer of Sam* also fit loosely into the serial-killer genre, a line which stretches from *M* (1931) to *Se7en*. Several plot points even rekindle memories of Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (1926): as the lynch-mob mentality gets out of control, an innocent man is targeted simply because he doesn't fit in.

Lee, who adapted an original screenplay by Victor Colicchio and Michael Imperioli, isn't above playing up the Italian-American stereotypes. Family loyalty and religious guilt figure as prominently here as they do in Scorsese's movies. Well over two hours long, *Summer of Sam* isn't taut, either. It is an ensemble piece full of flamboyant minor characters (Tony Olives, Joey T), all of them played beautifully. Ben Gazzara's patriarchal mobster has one big scene in a restaurant, but is barely glimpsed after that; Bebe Neuwirth (Vinny's boss) and Patti Lupone (Ritchie's mother) seem similarly underused.

Lee's focus is more on Vinny's crumbling marriage to Dionna and his friendship with Ritchie. Mumbling, cursing, intensely physical, John Leguizamo's Vinny comes across like a diminutive version of Brando's Stanley Kowalski. Adrien Brody is equally striking as the punk who wanders round

New York 'sounding like a British fag,' and looking as if he has just escaped from Carnaby Street. Berkowitz then is only there to provide the historical context for what turns out to be one of Lee's very best films – a sprawling, brilliantly acted character study which touches on love, friendship and betrayal, while also managing to recreate the last days of disco without a note of self-parody.

### **Geoffrey Macnab, *Sight and Sound*, February 2000**

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#### **SUMMER OF SAM**

*Director:* Spike Lee  
*Production Companies:* Touchstone Pictures, 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks  
*©:* Hostage Productions  
*Executive Producers:* Michael Imperioli, Jeri Carroll-Colicchio  
*Producers:* Spike Lee, Jon Kilik  
*Production Manager:* Jon Kilik  
*Location Supervisor:* Greg Routt  
*Post-production Supervisor:* Miles Ferguson  
*1st Assistant Director:* Mike Ellis  
*Script Supervisor:* Andrea Greer  
*Casting:* Aisha Coley  
*Screenplay:* Victor Colicchio, Michael Imperioli, Spike Lee  
*Writer:* Spike Lee  
*Creative Consultant:* Black Nexxus Inc  
*Director of Photography:* Ellen Kuras  
*A Camera Operator:* Jeffery J. Tufano  
*Steadicam Operator:* Larry McConkey  
*Visual Effects/Animation:* Rhythm and Hues  
*Special Effects Co-ordinator:* Steve Kirschhoff  
*Editor:* Barry Alexander Brown  
*Associate Editor:* Allyson C. Johnson  
*Production Designer:* Thérèse Deprez  
*Art Director:* Nicholas Lundy  
*Set Decorator:* Diane Lederman  
*Costume Designer:* Ruth E. Carter  
*Wardrobe Supervisors:* Michael Tavares, Darlene Jackson  
*Key Make-up:* Anita Gibson  
*Key Hairstylists:* Michelle Johnson, Leonard Drake  
*Main/End Title Design:* Balsmeyer & Everett Inc  
*Music/Score Conductor:* Terence Blanchard  
*Orchestral Leader:* Gavyn Wright  
*Music Supervisor:* Alex Steyermark  
*Music Co-ordinator:* Linda Cohen  
*Music Editors:* Maisie Weissman, Lori Slomka  
*Score Recorder/Mixer:* Geoff Foster  
*Choreography:* Otis Sallid  
*Dance Instructor:* Paul Pellicoro  
*Sound Design:* Blake Leyh  
*Sound Mixer:* Rolf Pardula  
*Re-recording Mixer:* Tom Fleischman  
*Supervising Sound Editor:* Kevin Lee  
*Dialogue Editors:* Kimberly McCord, Hal Levinsohn, Harry Bowles, Jack Rubenstein  
*Sound Effects Editor:* Glenfield Payne  
*Supervising ADR Editor:* Kenton Jakub  
*ADR Editor:* Gina Alfano  
*Foley Artist:* Marko Costanzo  
*Supervising Foley Editor:* Ben Cheah  
*Foley Editors:* Andrew Kris, Tim O'Shea, Jennifer Ralston  
*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Jeff Ward  
*Technical Adviser:* Richard Paul  
*Guitar Consultant:* Tristan Avakian

#### **Cast**

John Leguizamo (*Vinny*)  
Adrien Brody (*Ritchie*)  
Mira Sorvino (*Dionna*)  
Jennifer Esposito (*Ruby*)  
Anthony LaPaglia (*Detective Lou Petrocelli*)  
Bebe Neuwirth (*Gloria*)  
Patti Lupone (*Helen*)  
Ben Gazzara (*Luigi*)  
John Savage (*Simon*)  
Michael Badalucco (*Son of Sam, David Berkowitz*)  
Michael Rispoli (*Joey T*)  
Mike Starr (*Eddie*)  
Roger Guenveur Smith (*Detective Curt Atwater*)  
Saverio Guerra (*Woodstock*)  
Brian Tarantino (*Bobby Del Fiore*)  
Arthur Nascarella (*Mario*)  
Ken Garito (*Brian*)  
Al Palagonia (*Anthony*)  
Joe Lisi (*Tony Olives*)  
James Reno (*crony*)  
Jimmy Breslin (*himself*)  
Spike Lee (*John Jeffries*)  
Lucia Grillo (*Chiara*)  
Nelson Vasquez (*Officer Cruz*)  
Darielle Gilad (*Debbie Cadabra*)  
Michael Harper (*Raygun*)  
Jessica Galbreath (*Fire*)  
Evan Cohen (*Bite*)  
George Tabb (*Spider*)  
Michael Imperioli (*Midnight*)  
Victor Colicchio (*Chickie*)  
Peter Maloney (*Detective Timothy Dowd*)  
Christopher Wynkoop (*Sam Carr*)  
John Turturro (*voice of Harvey the Black Dog*)  
Ernie Anastos, Jim Jensen (*anchormen*)  
Melba Tolliver (*anchorwoman*)  
Phil Rizuto (*Yankee broadcaster*)  
Reggie Jackson (*himself*)  
Danielle Burgio, Lisa France (*girls in parked car*)  
Peter Epstein (*Chuckie*)  
Jill Stokesberry (*Rose*)  
Joseph Lyle Taylor (*Ron*)  
Kim Director (*Dee*)  
Bill Raymond (*Father Cadilli*)  
Mildrid Clinton, Emelise Aleandri (*Italian women at murder site*)  
Michael Sorvino (*bowler at diner*)  
Phil Campanella (*2nd bowler at diner*)  
William H. Burns, Ernest Mingione (*officers*)  
Frank Fortunato (*doorman*)

USA 1999

142 mins

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