



BE GAY DO CRIME: A SEASON OF QUEER CRIME FILMS

Dog Day Afternoon

Dog Day Afternoon

Directed by: Sidney Lumet

©: Warner Bros.

Production: Artists Entertainment
Complex Productions

Produced by: Martin Bregman, Martin Elfand

Associate Producer: Robert Greenhut

Location Manager: Martin Danzig

Assistant Director: Burrtt Harris

2nd Assistant Director: Alan Hopkins

Script Supervisor: B.J. Bjorkman

Casting: Don Phillips, Michael Chinich

Screenplay by: Frank Pierson

Based upon a magazine article by: P.F. Kluge,
Thomas Moore

Director of Photography: Victor J. Kemper

Camera Operator: Fred Schuler

Key Grip: James Finnerty

Gaffer: Richard Quinlan

Stills by: Muky

Film Editor: Dede Allen

Assistant Editor: Angelo Corrao

Production Designer: Charles Bailey

Art Director: Doug Higgins

Set Decorator: Robert Drumheller

Scenic Artist: Stanley Cappiello

Propmaster: Joe Caracciolo

Carpenter: Carlos Quiles

Construction Grip: Joseph Williams

Costume Designer: Anna Hill Johnstone

Wardrobe Supervisors: Cliff Capone, Peggy Farrell

Makeup Artist: Reginald Tackley

Hairdresser: Philip Leto

Colour by: Technicolor

Sound Mixer: James Sabat

Rerecording Supervisor: Richard Vorisek

Sound Editor: Jack Fitzstephens

[Assistant] Sound Editors: Richard Cirincione,
Sanford Rackow, Stephen A. Rotter

Photographic Equipment by: Panavision

Unit Publicity: Solters & Roskin

Cast:

Al Pacino (*Sonny Wortzik*)

the bank

Penelope Allen (*Sylvia*)

Sully Boyar (*Mulvaney*)

John Cazale (*Sal*)

Beulah Garrick (*Margaret*)

Carol Kane (*Jenny*)

Sandra Kazan (*Deborah*)

Marcia Jean Kurtz (*Miriam*)

Amy Levitt (*Maria*)

John Marriott (*Howard*)

Estelle Omens (*Edna*)

Gary Springer (*Stevie*)

the law

James Broderick (*Sheldon*)

Charles Durning (*Moretti*)

Carmine Foresta (*Carmine*)

Lance Henriksen (*Murphy*)

Floyd Levine (*phone cop*)

Dick Anthony Williams (*limo driver*)

the family

Dominic Chianese (*Sonny's father*)

Marcia Haufrecht (*neighbour*)

Judith Malina (*Sonny's mother*)

Susan Peretz (*Angie*)

Chris Sarandon (*Leon Shermer*)

the street

William Bogert (*TV anchorman*)

Ron Cummins (*TV reporter*)

Jay Gerber (*Sam*)

On August 22, 1972 at about 3 p.m., when the temperature in New York hovered around the debilitating mark of 97 degrees, the all-news radio stations began carrying the first reports of an intriguing story. At a small branch of the Chase Manhattan Bank at Avenue P and 3rd Street in the wilds of Brooklyn a robbery was in progress. A not unusual occurrence, except that this time the two young men who were holding a dozen or so employees and customers at bay had a special purpose in mind. The leader, 'Littlejohn' Wojtowicz, wanted the money to finance gender-affirming surgery for his (then) male wife.

The small branch didn't have enough cash on hand and an alarm had been tripped, as well, so Littlejohn and his accomplice Sal found themselves trapped. They rather smartly turned to the media in an attempt to salvage the caper, and for the next few hours the city was treated to a diverting series of episodes in the continuing saga of Sal, Littlejohn, his wife Ernie (who was brought to the scene direct from a hospital bed in order to plead with him), his mother, and his first wife Carmen, the mother of his two children. The story ended abruptly later that night when Sal was shot dead and Littlejohn taken into custody. But for several hours the two amateur bank robbers had held the attention of the city with the kind of pseudo-event that radio stations (and TV stations as well, now that they have lightweight portable video cameras which permit instant coverage of such stories) have learned to love.

It was inevitable that the Littlejohn saga would find its way into the complex web of fiction that feeds on events such as these, and indeed it has – magazine story, novel, reams of newspaper copy, and now Sidney Lumet's film from Frank Pierson's screenplay. The film started out as an exploitation vehicle with the title 'Boys in the Bank' and it was with such prospects in mind that producers Martin Bregman and Martin Elfand were able to sell the project to Warner Brothers with Al Pacino (a dead ringer for Littlejohn, by the way) as star.

But the script underwent drastic revisions just before and during shooting and the result, *Dog Day Afternoon*, is a film rather far from the condescending parody one might have expected. The producers might have ripped off the real-life characters financially (they bought rights to the story for pitifully small amounts; suits and countersuits are now flying thick and fast), but Pierson and Lumet have come up with a movie of surprising wit, humour and understanding.

Lumet has always done his best work on location in New York. He seems to come alive in the city, and the half dozen or so films he has made here rank among the best New York movies of the last 15 years. Lumet the bad is responsible for pompous symbolic dramas like *The Pawnbroker* and *The Hill* (or at best weighty, sluggish translations from the stage, like *A View from the Bridge* and *The Seagull*). Lumet the good, however, has evinced an unmatched feel for the rhythms of New York City in such films as *Bye Bye Braverman*, *The Anderson Tapes*, *Serpico* (despite its serious ideological problems) and *The Group*.

In its understanding of the way people talk, act and think in the city, *Dog Day Afternoon* is striking: a veritable sociological data bank. Lumet can draw more out of talented actors like John Cazale, Sully Boyar, Carol Kane, Marcia Jean

Philip Charles MacKenzie (*doctor*)
Chu Chu Malave (*Maria's boyfriend*)
Lionel Pina (*pizza boy*)
uncredited
Thomas Murphy (*policeman with Angie*)
USA 1975©
125 mins

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Bound

Tue 1 Aug 20:35 (+ pre-recorded intro by film critic Xuanlin Tham); Fri 11 Aug 20:30; Thu 31 Aug 18:10

Dog Day Afternoon

Wed 2 Aug 20:30; Thu 17 Aug 18:00;
Sun 27 Aug 18:15

Chocolate Babies

Thu 3 Aug 20:30 (+ intro by season programmer Grace Barber-Plentie); Sat 19 Aug 20:50

Female Trouble

Sat 5 Aug 18:15; Thu 10 Aug 18:15 (+ intro by Justin Johnson, Lead Programmer);
Fri 25 Aug 20:45

The Devil Queen (A Rainha Diaba)

Mon 7 Aug 20:40; Fri 18 Aug 18:10

By Hook or By Crook

Tue 8 Aug 20:50; Tue 15 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by Zorian Clayton, BFI Flare Programmer)

Madame Satã

Thu 10 Aug 20:40; Sun 20 Aug 12:30

Fresh Kill

Mon 14 Aug 20:40; Sun 27 Aug 13:20

The Bloodettes (Les Saignantes)

Tue 15 Aug 20:30; Mon 21 Aug 20:30

My Brother the Devil

Wed 16 Aug 20:40; Thu 24 Aug 17:50

On Guard

Thu 17 Aug 20:45; Mon 21 Aug 18:30

The Living End

Tue 22 Aug 20:40; Mon 28 Aug 14:30

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Kurtz, James Broderick, Charles Durning and Chris Sarandon than just about any other director working today. There is a real sense here of the subtle, non-verbal modes of communication between people that so fascinate anthropologists these days. It may be difficult to give examples of these shrewd successes of the actor's art in print, but the effect is clear and striking on screen. Especially when photographed by the remarkable Victor J. Kemper, one of the most judicious and intelligent cinematographers at work today.

But *Dog Day Afternoon*, despite (or rather because of) these simple pleasures, has more to say. Frank Pierson's script describes a state of mind and a state of politics that is absolutely right for the time and place of the film, even if it hasn't yet been articulated in print. Gradually but surely, Littlejohn and Sal yield centre stage as our attention is turned to the two groups that surround them: the hostages inside the bank and the crowd of spectators who gather outside to participate in the media event. The scenes within the bank reveal a knowledge of 'victimology', the psychology of the victims in situations like these. As the bank manager and his staff get to know the very nervous kid who has broken their routine they tend to identify with him, to see things from his perspective. They slowly realise that the police and the FBI outside have as their first priority not the preservation of the hostages' lives but the preservation of an ideal of social order. Outside the bank, meanwhile, Lumet captures not only the air of festivity (this is an event after all) but also the felt undercurrent of political discontent. Sonny exploits this (in a brilliant scene) by chanting the one-word slogan 'Attica!' at the cops, a refrain that is quickly picked up by the restless crowd.

Not to suggest that the politics of *Dog Day Afternoon* are as simplistic as that slogan. The crowd, rooting for Sonny (Littlejohn in the film) during the afternoon, quickly turn on him when they find out that he's gay. (Then the gay activists turn up with placards to make political capital of the event.) The police, meanwhile, have their own problems. Moretti (Charles Durning) is chief of the hostage squad of the N.Y.P.D. He knows his business and he has a sense of the forlornness of situations like these. Sheldon (James Broderick), on the other hand, heads the FBI squad and is full of a supercilious contempt for the local cop's sensibilities. I've met several FBI agents in years past. I've always been fascinated by the supercilious macho air they all seem to carry with them, a complicated persona that broadcasts a sense of power, nonchalance and sexual energy. They must learn it in training school. But I've never seen this very precise, easily recognisable attitude portrayed on the screen before. It's one of the small pleasures of *Dog Day Afternoon*, which when taken together give the film an honest vitality as well as a rather sophisticated if low-key political sense.

James Monaco, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1975/76