



RE-RELEASE

Mean Streets

Mean Streets

Director: Martin Scorsese

©: Inc. Warner Bros

Production Company:

Taplin-Perry-Scorsese Productions

Presented by: Warner Bros.

Executive Producer: E. Lee Perry

Producer: Jonathan T. Taplin

Production Manager: Paul Rapp

Pre-production/Post-production Co-ordinator:

Sandra Weintraub

Production Co-ordinator: Peter Fain

Production Co-ordinator (2nd Unit): Joe Cupcake

Assistant to the Producer: Neil Rapp,

Pamela Williams

1st Assistant Director: Russell Vreeland

2nd Assistant Director: Ron Satloff

Script Supervisor: Bobbie Sierks

Screen Play: Martin Scorsese, Mardik Martin

Story: Martin Scorsese

Director of Photography: Kent Wakeford

Additional Photography: Norman Gerard

Camera Operator: Gene Talvin

Assistant Camera: Pat O'Mara

2nd Assistant Camera: Harry Young

Gaffer: Bobby Petzoldt

Best Boy: Bill Young

Key Grip: John Murray

Special Effects: Bill Bales

Editor: Sid Levin

Assistant Editor: George Trirrogoff

Visual Consultant: David Nichols

Assistant Visual Consultant: Doyle Hall

Prop Master: Bill Bates

Wardrobe: Norman Salling

Clothing Consultant: Cornelia McNamara

Titles/Opticals/Processing: CFI

Laboratory: Consolidated Film Industries

Colour by: Technicolor

Sound Mixer: Don Johnson

Sound: Glen Glenn

Boom Operator: Kenny Schwarz

Re-recording Mixer: John K. Williamson,

Bud Grenzbach, Walter Goss

Sound Re-recording: Glen Glenn Sound

Sound Effects: Angel Editorial

Stunt Co-ordinator: Bill Katching

Special Thanks to: Paul Almond,

Frankie Aquilino, Nicki 'Ack' Aquilino,

Frankie Bananas, Larry The Box, Dale Bell,

Mitchell Block, Dean Bojorquez, Hooter Brown,

Jay Cocks, Brian De Palma, Norman Garey,

Jenny Goldberg, Alec Hirschfeld, Dr Robert Kahn,

Richard Katz, John Krauss, Angelo Lanonea,

Jim McCalmont, Michael Mislove, Bill Minkin,

Nancy Nigrosh, Lee Osborne, Sally Red,

Billy Saluga, Bill Sandell, Catherine Scorsese,

Brad Shattuck, George Smith, Edward Stable,

Dita Sullivan, Brian Swain, Harry Ufland,

Anna Uricola, Dominic Vaccaro, Fred Vaccaro,

Roger Vreeland, Barbara Weintraub,

San Gennaro Feast Committee

Animal Trainer: George Toth

Filmed at: Hollywood Stages (Los Angeles)

Cast:

Robert De Niro (*Johnny Boy*)

Harvey Keitel (*Charlie*)

David Proval (*Tony*)

Amy Robinson (*Teresa*)

Richard Romanus (*Michael*)

Cesare Danova (*Giovanni*)

Vic Argo (*Mario*)

Jeannie Bell (*Diane*)

Ask someone to pick their favourite moment from a film by Martin Scorsese, something defining. Many would cite Robert De Niro's memorable 'you talkin' to me?' challenge to his own leering, gun-toting reflection in *Taxi Driver* (1976); others, the same actor's majestic, slow-motion dance around a boxing ring as Jake LaMotta in *Raging Bull* (1980), or his tragi-comic monologue at the end of that film; others, the long tracking shot that follows Ray Liotta's Henry Hill through the Copacabana in *GoodFellas* (1990).

For me, the indelible scene comes earlier, in *Mean Streets* (1973), and is so embedded in my film memory that I can't recall when it first inserted itself; it's always been there. De Niro again (how could it not be), as the anarchic, ducking and diving, doomed Johnny Boy, making his first entrance into the lurid environs of his friend's bar, Volpe's – moving in slow motion, a girl in each arm, Cheshire Cat grin threatening to crack his face in half, the Rolling Stone's 'Jumpin' Jack Flash' expressing the irreverent danger he represents to best friend Charlie (Harvey Keitel), who's waiting stony-faced at the other end of the bar. It's an exhilarating moment, in one of the great calling-card movies in American cinema.

Scorsese's bravura tale of small-time hoods and rogues in Manhattan's Little Italy was his third feature and the one that confirmed him as a major new talent in a period of American film production that was experiencing an embarrassment of riches. On its premiere at the New York Film Festival in October 1973, Pauline Kael hailed *Mean Streets* as 'a true original of our period, a triumph of personal filmmaking'. The critic also called it the best American movie of the year, high praise considering that other releases included *The Exorcist*, *The Last Detail*, *Badlands*, *American Graffiti* and *Serpico*.

Of all the so-called 'movie brats' associated with the New Hollywood, or Hollywood Renaissance, of the 1970s, Scorsese was one of the most distinctive; while Francis Ford Coppola's ambition briefly threatened to challenge the studio system, and Steven Spielberg and George Lucas would reboot it for the blockbuster age, Scorsese aspired to make studio films with a sensibility that was and predominantly remains independent, setting a model that has been emulated by only a few exceptional directors.

At the heart of that independence is what Kael correctly identified as a deeply personal style on filmmaking. Speaking about *Mean Streets* in 2004, Scorsese himself commented: 'In my mind it's not really a film, but a declaration or a statement of who I am and how I was living, and those thoughts and dilemmas and conflicts that were very much a part of my life at that time.'

His story was wrought from his own experience growing up in the Italian-American enclave of downtown Manhattan, one that was subtly controlled by organised crime. This was singular enough, yet the autobiographical quality of the film has another dimension, namely the intense cinephilia that was completely integral to this young man's growing sense of self.

The asthmatic child unsuited to the dog-eat-dog world of the streets, who had sought refuge and delight in the cinema, had by his twenties embraced both classic Hollywood and European art cinema, the Direct Cinema documentary movement and New York's experimental underground. He had heroes, gods even: Elia Kazan, John Cassavetes, the Italian neorealists. But while Scorsese is one of those filmmakers whose influences are open, passionate, sincere – he can hardly speak of his own work without referring to other films, and is more than happy to borrow a stylistic trope or two – the result is rarely derivative.

David Carradine (*drunk in Tony's bar*)
Robert Carradine (*boy with gun*)
D'Mitch Davis (*Davis, the cop*)
George Memmoli (*Joey*)
Murray Mosten (*Oscar*)
Harry Northup (*Jerry the soldier*)
Lenny Scaletta (*Jimmy*)
Ken Sinclair (*Sammy*)
Lois Walden (*Jewish girl*)
Robert Wilder (*Benton*)
Dino Seragusa (*old man*)
Peter Fain (*George*)
Julie Andleman (*girl at party*)
Jaime Alba (*young boy #1*)
Ken Konstantin (*young boy #2*)
Nicki 'Ack' Aquilino (*man on docks*)
B. Mitchell Reed (*disc jockey*)
Martin Scorsese (*Michael's hired gunman in car*) *
Catherine Scorsese
(*old woman on stairs helping Teresa*) *
USA 1973
112 mins
Digital 4K

* Uncredited

An Altitude Film Distribution release

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Indeed, having got the film student's tendency towards homage out of his system in his short films and first feature, *Who's That Knocking at My Door* (1967), with *Mean Streets* Scorsese performed something akin to creative alchemy. Driven by a desire to represent his Italian-American roots, Scorsese poured memories, personal conflicts and an almost Dickensian array of real-life characters into a cauldron, along with a multitude of filmic inspirations, to produce something new, with its own potency. *Mean Streets* was thrillingly original, at once authentic and flamboyant, and it established a film language that continues to be immediately identifiable as Scorsese's own.

The story is set amid the bars, pool halls, tenements and streets of Little Italy during the religious festival of San Gennaro. The protagonist, twenty-something Charlie, runs numbers and collects debts for his uncle, Giovanni, a powerful local Mafioso. Charlie is torn between ambition and Catholic guilt; his attempted penance, the 'salvation' of his volatile best friend Johnny, will prove his undoing.

Mean Streets introduced many of the director's preoccupations – notably with guilt, redemption and criminal subculture – along with his signature traits: conflicted, audience-challenging male protagonists; a *vérité* use of location; a mobile, expressive visual style; graphic violence; and the use of rock and pop songs (as well as Italian folk songs and opera) as integral elements to a scene's dramatic construction.

Scorsese was hardly the only director in the 1970s shooting in the streets, or telling nihilistic stories, or making films about crime. Sidney Lumet's *Serpico* (1973) and *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), William Friedkin's *The French Connection* (1971), Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Godfather Part II* (1974) variously tick these boxes. The difference is in the intense subjectivity that Scorsese brings to his work: while we can watch any of these other films from a safe distance, with *Mean Streets* we're yanked by our collars right into Scorsese's world, because it really is *his* world. The film was, and remains, the most extraordinarily vivid, lived experience. As another of Scorsese's heroes, Michael Powell, said of the film: 'With *Mean Streets* he is in direct contact with his audience, from the beginning to the end.'

To what extent *Mean Streets* is a gangster film is often debated. Scorsese himself has frequently referenced the genre while discussing the film, and his characters and milieu make the allusion unavoidable; to some degree it must be regarded within a small group of crime films that includes *GoodFellas*, *Casino* (1995) and, almost fifty years later, *The Irishman* (2019). However, with its freeform structure, a willingness to eschew plot for character, and an underlying fusion of personal investment with documentary zeal, *Mean Streets* ultimately transcends genre.

He's made many films since that were close to his heart, were products of love, sweat, tears and determination: for example *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and *Gangs of New York* (2002). But, arguably, his filmmaking would never be as truly personal as it was in *Mean Streets*, certainly not as free, as unimpeded by outside forces. This partly explains why, to me, it feels like the most vital of Scorsese's films. On a biographical note, watching the film leaves the impression that we've seen the person he left behind, on those mean streets, and glimpsed the filmmaker he was to become. Within cinema, *Raging Bull* may be Scorsese's masterpiece, *GoodFellas* his perfect gangster movie, *Taxi Driver* his most iconic film (and the one that continues to have a societal resonance), but *Mean Streets* has been his most influential work – not only for the crime genre, but for subsequent generations of maverick filmmakers.

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