

# Aiello develops a kinship with 'Ruby'

By Susan Spillman  
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LOS ANGELES — Danny Aiello knows his new film *Ruby* is in a risky position, opening on the heels of Oliver Stone's much-publicized *JFK*.

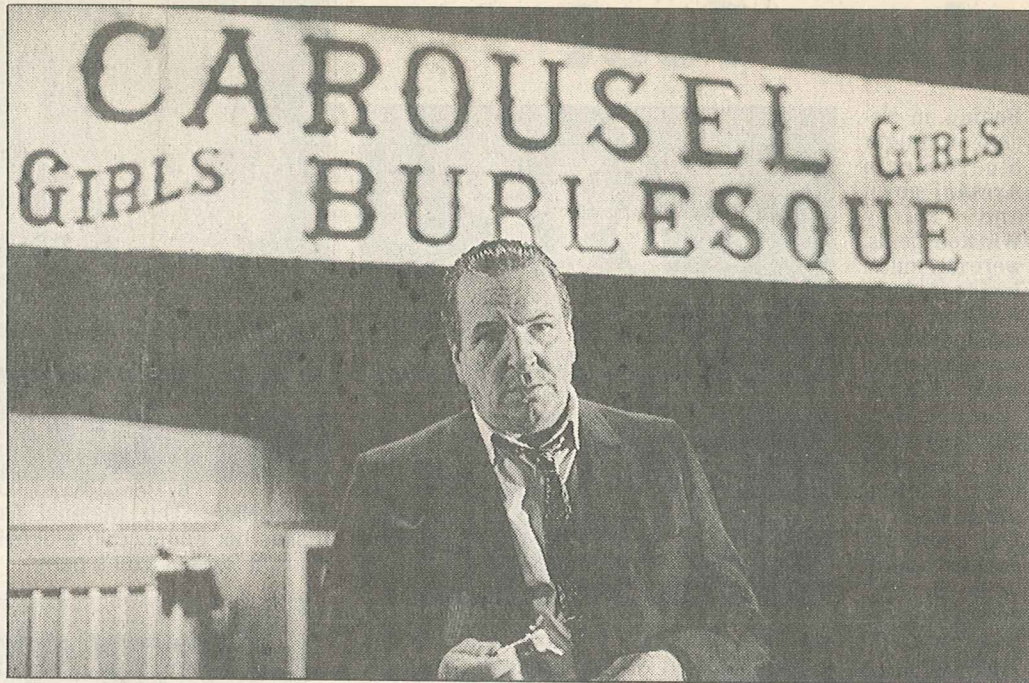
"I was fighting like hell at the beginning to get it opened with *JFK*," the actor says. "But they (the producers) said it was physically impossible. A lot of people thought we maybe were a coat-tail production. We're not, we were there first."

In fact, *Ruby* is adapted from the London play *Love Field*. The story explores circumstances leading up to and following the assassination of John F. Kennedy as seen through the eyes of Jack Ruby, the man who shot Lee Harvey Oswald. A mix of fact and fiction, it examines the possibility that the Mafia and the CIA conspired to kill the president.

Aiello, 58, has a passion for the project. That's partly because it's the first film he carries, a status he admits "is scary because if they (people) don't come, you blame it on yourself."

More important though, he feels an affinity for Ruby, who ran a small-time burlesque bar on Dallas' Commercial Street.

"Our lives paralleled," says Aiello, who broke into show business as an emcee at New York's Improvisation comedy



**DANNY AIELLO:** The actor sees many parallels in his life and Jack Ruby's. 'Jack in another lifetime could have been an actor. Where we turn the different corner is that he killed a guy and I didn't.'

club. "I used to run numbers when I was a kid (so did Ruby). I was a bouncer. . . . He was a bouncer. He ran strip joints, I ran after-hours joints. I would get up and emcee. He would get up and emcee . . . and we want to be loved.

"Jack in another lifetime could have been an actor. Where we turn the different corner is that he killed a guy

and I didn't."

Still, Aiello — who took up acting at age 35 and has been married for 37 years — doesn't see Ruby as a bad guy. "Most of his girls loved him. He would fire them and five minutes later he'd hire them back because he felt bad. Think of the day that he killed Oswald . . . he just finished sending a money order to a girl who needed

money who'd worked for him. He's a complex guy."

The self-taught actor, Oscar-nominated for *Do the Right Thing*, hopes the movie fares better at the box office than his past three. The heartwarming *29th Street* disappeared fast from theaters last December. Aiello blames a lack of marketing support from the studio: "20th Century Fox led us to be-

lieve that they were going to back it. . . . Then *For the Boys* came and all the resources went into *For the Boys*. . . . It killed me."

Another letdown: *Once Around* with Richard Dreyfuss and Holly Hunter. Aiello says it contains some of his best work, but he's upset that Universal bumped the opening from December '90 to January '91. In January, "people are thinking about . . . where they're gonna get their next buck and they're not thinking about feel-good movies."

He doesn't regret last summer's bomb *Hudson Hawk*, though. "I did *Hudson Hawk* because Bruce Willis was a friend of mine before he was an actor.

"I never, never felt sorry that I did it. What I was sorry for is the way that they picked on Joel (producer Joel Silver) and Bruce. . . . I mean I think there are bigger bombs than that that came out, that didn't get the significant press."

Up next are two show-biz themed films. First is *The Mistress* with Robert De Niro, in which Aiello plays a wealthy movie investor. Then comes *The Pickle*, in which Italian-American Aiello stars as a Jewish director.

"What I'm doing is getting even with all the Jewish actors who've been playing Italians," he laughs.