

Aiello comes to Dallas to play 'chameleonic' Jack Ruby role

By Jane Sumner
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DALLAS — All his life, Jack Ruby wanted to be a Big Man Around Town.

But running a second-string strip joint on Commerce Street didn't quite do it. Nor did firing a snub-nosed revolver into a handcuffed Lee Harvey Oswald.

And when Hollywood finally came calling in the form of a film bearing his name, Ruby — Chicago-born gangster, promoter and nightclub proprietor — had been dead for 24 years.

After two months in Los Angeles, "Ruby" recently came to Dallas to shoot for a week. Unlike Oliver Stone's "JFK," filmed here earlier this year, Lava Films' "Ruby" doesn't unravel conspiracy theories.

Rather, it focuses on the enig-



Jack Ruby

An enigmatic character matic man who silenced the accused killer of President Kennedy. But it is dramatic fiction, not a

documentary.

"Do the Right Thing" Oscar-nominee Danny Aiello, with slicked-back hair, plays the mercurial Ruby. "Twin Peaks" temptress Sherilyn Fenn is exotic dancer Candy Cane, whom Ruby befriends. And Willie Garson of "Mobsters" and "Soapdish" is Oswald.

While in Dallas, Aiello affably posed for photos with hundreds of

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fans and worried lest Dallas view his first visit as exploiting a painful event.

"Trust me, it's not," he said. "This role is one of the greatest ever written for a human being. And for me to be so fortunate to play it is an extraordinary opportunity. Ruby was very complex, chameleonlike, a placater. He wanted to be loved."

Garson, who plays Oswald, was born six months after President Kennedy's death.

"The assassination is so ingrained in people in Dallas," Garson said. "They come up to me on the street and say the most insane things, like 'Why did you do it?' or 'How did you plan it?'"

"I've looked at the whole conspiracy thing for years. I'm pretty sure that Oswald didn't shoot anybody. He might have fired a gun. I think he knew he was going to be a patsy, but I don't think he knew to what extent."

British writer Stephen Davis

adapted his play "Love Field" for the screen version, "Ruby." He explained why an Englishman wrote about Ruby.

"I was a 12-year-old kid watching TV when the word came through," Davis said. "I don't suppose my recollection is any less vivid than many Americans'. The subject caught me by the tail. It wouldn't leave me go until I'd written out this story about Jack Ruby."

The idea for the play started, he said, while he was working on a TV movie which "in a very marginal way" involved Lee Harvey

Oswald. The author of the book on which the TV movie was based had written about the Kennedy assassination.

He invited Davis to his cabin in Virginia to shoot a 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, the same kind found hidden on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.

"I thought, after that, he (Oswald) would have had difficulty killing a cow at a hundred feet with a Carcano rifle," Davis said.

"I think it was the experience of having the gun in my hand that mentally put me into Dealey Plaza

and sparked my curiosity."

"The best way I could reconstruct the experience of the assassination wasn't in any head-on way with who killed Kennedy but through a minor character. It's a little like looking at "Hamlet" through Rosencrantz and Guildenstern," he said.

Despite rumors that exotic dancer Candy Cane is really Candy Barr, the famed star of Abe Weinstein's Colony Club, Davis denies it.

"I invented her totally as a character," he said. "All the events and characters in the play have a historical basis, but not a documentary basis. There's no evidence that Ruby knew an exotic dancer who called herself Candy Cane who had a liaison with President Kennedy."

"What I did was imagine a new girl coming into the club and adapting a name from Candy Barr's stage name, but our Candy Cane is completely different."

Executive producer Signurion "Yoni" Signatsson; co-founder of Propaganda Films (Lava Films' parent company), which produced Madonna's "Truth or Dare" documentary, said Candy Cane is a composite of three or four women. They include Marilyn Monroe and also Judith Campbell Exner, who had relationships with Kennedy and organized-crime chief-tain Sam Giancana. Davis said the character sprang from his head.

"But when you see Sherrilyn, you're bound to think of Monroe."