

FILM REVIEW



Sherilyn Fenn and Danny Aiello yuk it up in "Ruby."

Ruby

(Drama—Color)

A Triumph Releasing Corp. release of a Polygram presentation of a Propaganda Films production. Produced by Sigurjon Sighvatsson, Steve Golin. Executive producer, Michael Kuhn. Co-producer, Jay Roewe. Directed by John Mackenzie. Screenplay, Stephen Davis, based on his play "Love Field." Camera (DeLuxe color), Phil Meheux; editor, Richard Trevor; music, John Scott; production design, David Brisbin; art direction, Kenneth A. Hardy; set design, Annie Mei-Ling Tien; set decoration, Lauri Gaffin; costume design, Susie DeSanto; sound (Dolby), David Brownlow; associate producers, Richard Wright, Lynn Weimer; assistant director, Matthew Carlisle; casting, Johanna Ray. Reviewed at the Sony Studios screening room in Culver City, March 20, 1992. MPAA Rating: R. Running time: 110 min.

Jack Ruby Danny Aiello
Candy Cane Sherilyn Fenn
Maxwell Arliss Howard
David Ferrie Tobin Bell
Officer Tippit David Duchovny
Proby Richard Sarafian
Louie Vitali Joe Cortese
Santos Alicante Marc Lawrence
Lee Harvey Oswald Willie Garson
Joseph Valachi Joe Viterelli
Sam Giancana Carmine Caridi

Earnest, first-rate performances by Danny Aiello and Sherilyn Fenn can't overcome the strewed story elements of this otherwise well-put-together drama, which will inevitably be hurt by its status as the second "JFK"-related movie to hit theaters in a six-month span. Conspiracy theorists will find their share of shadowy intrigue to

chew on, but "Ruby" has home-video written all over it and doesn't figure to shine too brightly at the box office.

This highly fictionalized biography of the club owner and small-time hood who killed Lee Harvey Oswald traces the events leading up to that moment, again pointing a finger at organized crime and rogue elements within the CIA as the parties responsible for bringing Camelot to a crashing end.

The fiction stems in large part from Ruby's relationship with a stripper, Candy Cane (Sherilyn Fenn), who, we're told at the end, is a composite of various characters.

Candy not only humanizes Ruby (Danny Aiello) but also provides a conduit between the mob and President Kennedy, as the object of one of his by-now famous extramarital dalliances.

Ruby starts to be drawn in when he's sent to Cuba to kill an imprisoned Mafia don (Marc Lawrence) but instead turns on the con who sent him, in the process being drawn back into big-league mob activities.

British director John Mackenzie ("The Long Good Friday") knows his way around gangster yarns, but the problem with "Ruby" is that it plays too much like TV docudrama and, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, a mystery wrapped in a riddle.

Working almost entirely from Ruby's perspective as an outsider looking in, the narrative never re-

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ally flows cohesively, and by the time Ruby states that no one knows the truth, so no one can tell the truth, it's too late for the film to overcome the frustrating nature of what's preceded that scene.

In short, writer Stephen Davis' central narrative device of structuring a story that's as confusing as the Warren Commission report may be good politics, but it's poor theater, despite the film's serious trappings and strong central performances.

Aiello is terrific as Ruby—a tough outsider who never quite was and comes to the ultimate realization that he never quite will be. Like the film itself, his background remains vague, but the image of a man in way over his head remains unmistakable.

Fenn turns in a performance hotter than a cup of "Twin Peaks" java as the power-seeking stripper, looking Monroe-like with her platinum blond locks and classic features.

Considering the nature of the part, the sympathy and appeal she brings to the role are remarkable.

Other actors give solid performances as well, among them Arliss Howard as an oily government operative and Tobin Bell as David Ferrie, a much lower-keyed role

here than in "JFK," with its riveting, over-the-top rantings of Joe Pesci.

The film does slip toward dangerously silly territory in its final act, when Ruby dresses up like one of the Blues Brothers to carry out the Oswald hit in "Monday Night Football" slow-motion fashion.

Other than that, Mackenzie brings a fine visual flair to the production, and the period mood and settings—including the incorporation of '60s footage—are credible even compared with the technically magnificent work in that regard on "JFK."

Additional technical credits are also superior, especially John Scott's brooding score and Susie DeSanto's costumes.

Still, when all's said and done, the best "Ruby" can hope to do is throw another few sticks on the fire that "JFK" started. — **Brian Lowry**