



Al Pacino stars as Steve Burns, an undercover policeman, in "Cruising."



the movies

Louise Snider

'Cruising' shows gay community without insight

Mayor Diane Feinstein of San Francisco, who has her problems with the city's large gay community, called "Cruising" (R) "provocative trash" without benefit of seeing it. Having seen it, one hates to admit it, but the mayor's uninformed judgement was right.

Al Pacino plays a New York City policeman who goes undercover in the homosexual hangouts of Greenwich Village to find the sadistic killer responsible for a series of stabbing deaths among the denizens of this nether world.

What the movie has to offer, for those who are curious about or turned on by the heavy leather scene, is a lot of suggestive imagery of straining, twisted male bodies in various stages of undress and sexual gratification. (This is an "R" film which shades into an "X.")

It's a dark, sweaty tableau of degradation which could pass for one of the circles of Dante's Hell.

INCIDENTS WITH police who are hassling and abusing the homosexuals, suggest the gays aren't the only ones with hangups, but "Cruising" provides neither a sociological point of view nor psychological insight. The film displays no concern for the situation and no interest in examining the whys and wherefores of this community or of the hostility it arouses among the police force.

The closest the film gets to the realities of daily, or nightly, life is a quick lesson on the mores of the selection and mating process. Sexual preferences are indicated by the color of a man's bandana and the pocket in which he wears it — the modern equivalent, perhaps, of the way the dandy of an earlier century wore his rapier or sword.

Director William Friedkin, who hasn't scored at the box office since "The Exorcist," has to depend on shock value to grab an audience. Evidence of his attempt to force the film to fit his game plan for maximum morbid impact is available from the beginning.

A tugboat pulls a human arm out of the harbor. The stiff, grayish blue appendage is placed on a morgue slab with an assortment of other parts. Several times in the film the police talk about linking the killer of the knifed homosexuals with these dismemberments. But the link is never forged, so who introduce these grisly crimes?

THE ONLY REASON is to keep popping shocking scenes in front of the audience, because "Cruising" has nothing else going for it.

Neither Pacino, nor the suspected killer (Richard Cox), nor the chief of detectives (Paul Sorvino), nor Pacino's girlfriend (Karen Allen) ever develops a dimensional character. The thoughts and feelings of Pacino's cop are as much a puzzle at the end of the film as at the beginning.

We never learn how he feels about assimilating into the homosexual subculture or how it is affecting him. Worse yet, for a murder mystery, everything is left ambiguous.

The gay community which brought this film so much publicity with its protests might have been wiser to keep silent and wait for the public to find out for itself. "Cruising" offers only a grubby sensationalism.

It's filled with red herrings; its characters are uninteresting; its point of view is confusing; its images are sordid; it's a rotten film.



The gay life is presented in seamy fashion, with emphasis on shock-value scenes.

'Gates of Heaven' shown

First-run in the metropolitan area is "Gates of Heaven," a 1976 film directed by Errol Morris, to be shown at 7 and 9:30 p.m. Friday by Detroit Film Theatre in the Detroit Institute of Arts auditorium/theater.

General admission tickets may be purchased in advance through the art institute ticket office and at the door. For ticket information and a free Detroit Film Theatre weekend movie schedule through mid-June, call 832-2720.

"The Wild Bunch," totally uncult, with 20 minutes never before seen in this country, is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Saturday. The film directed by Sam Peckinpah was released in 1969. This film of the changing American West stars William Holden, Robert Ryan and Ernest Borgnine.

John Huston's 1941 film, "The Maltese Falcon," starring Humphrey Bogart as detective Sam Spide, will be shown at 7:30 p.m. Sunday. Sidney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre and Mary Astor also star.



On stage

Singer/songwriter Jane Olivor will perform on stage at 8 p.m. April 13 at the Birmingham Theatre. Ms. Olivor's last Michigan appearance, at Pine Knob, was taped and aired as part of Public Television's "Summerfest" music series. For ticket information contact the Birmingham Theatre box office at 644-3533.

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