



Mel Gibson: 'The Man Without a Face'



A boy who's troubled about his future — a man who's haunted by his past — together they build a friendship that has healing power for both of them.

Mel Gibson stars and makes his directing debut with "The Man Without a Face," a drama about overcoming loneliness, learning to become an adult and remembering a special summer when understanding, companionship and encouragement transformed two lives.

To the people of Cranespoot, Maine, Justin McLeod (Gibson) has been an outsider since the day he arrived in their peaceful coastal village. For the last seven years, his scarred face and the mystery surrounding his past have made him the object of rumor and scorn.

Whispered snatches of a tale involving a terrible car accident, a fatally injured student and a brilliant teaching career cut short follow McLeod all over town. Surrounded by his books and paintings, he has learned to live with the soli-

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tude his tragic past and disfigurement are forced upon him. Twelve-year-old Chuck Norstadt (Nick Stahl) is also an outsider — to his own family. Living with his superficial, flirtatious mother (who is about to hitch onto husband number five) and two resentful half-sisters, Chuck has only cloudy memories of his father who died when Chuck was a toddler. His confusion over his father's departure and his feeling of being unwelcome in his own family have made Chuck a defensive and distant kid on the outside — and a desperately unhappy one on the inside.

Determined to find a place in the world that doesn't put him in competition with his sisters, Chuck is resolved to spend his summer in Cranespoot studying for an entrance exam to the boarding school his father attended. But, having failed the examination once, he realizes he needs help and turns to McLeod for tutoring.

As their summer unfolds, both McLeod and Chuck discover more than either had hoped for — their friendship, which begins as a clashing of horns, grows into a genuine sharing of ideas and thoughts, enriching both and providing each with a crucial perspective on his life. Chuck discovers his own intelligence, confidence and tolerance and McLeod rediscovers the ability to relate to another human being and the joy and excitement of teaching.

But the townspeople of Cranespoot, accustomed to concealing and believing their own outrageous speculation about McLeod, learn he is tutoring Chuck and become distrustful of the man they fear and cannot understand. Chuck's mother, who has spent years ignoring her son's need for attention, suddenly becomes a strident accuser, demanding that McLeod stay away from her son.

Chuck is heartfist and McLeod is furious, but hysterical sweeps the small Maine town and, before Chuck knows it, his summer of friendship and

learning has been painted in much darker shades. Chuck must say goodbye to his mentor for ever, but not before being prepared to pass the entrance exam to his father's alma mater and beginning his own trek to adulthood.

And McLeod, "the man without a face," has learned to make peace with his past, to view with compassion the fear that people have of what they can't comprehend, and to regard with new appreciation the invigoration that friendship has once more brought into his life.

"The Man Without a Face," released by Warner Bros., is based on the novel by Isabelle Holland, and produced by Bruce Davey. It is rated PG (Some material may not be suitable for pre-teenagers).

"The Man Without a Face" opened Wednesday and is showing at these suburban movie theaters: AMC Old Orchard, AMC Laurel Park, General Cinema Novi, Showcase Auburn Hills, Showcase Westland, Star Rochester, United Artists Oakland.



Family drama: Chuck Norstadt (Nick Stahl) learns a lesson from the reclusive Justin McLeod (Mel Gibson) in Warner Bros.' heartwarming film about friendship, "The Man Without A Face."

Laughs and thrills underscore 'Manhattan Murder Mystery'



JOHN MONAGHAN

Not only is "Manhattan Murder Mystery" the funniest movie Woody Allen has produced in several years, but as a cleverly plotted spoof of the mystery genre, it delivers more than a few genuine thrills.

Woody reunites with former leading lady Diane Keaton and, for the first few minutes, you might think you're watching Mia Farrow, who the part was originally written for. Her question: "Do you still find me attractive?"

To Allen's typically neurotic book editor was spoken verbatim by Farrow in "Husbands and Wives."

Soon, Keaton and the movie take on a life of their own. You remember how funny she truly is, how uninspired her parts have been since breaking off her professional relationship with Allen after "Annie Hall" in 1977 and what a perfect match they make on-screen.

She plays Carol, an aspiring restaurateur who believes that Paul (Jerry Adler), a mild-mannered neighbor down the hall, has seduced his wife. Unable to get

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doubting husband Larry to join in the sleuthing, she turns instead to playwright friend Ted (Alan Alda).

Slowly clues fall into place. The official cause of death is heart attack though the woman wasn't on any restricted diet. Carol discovers the wife's urn in Paul's kitchen cupboard, which contradicts statements about side-by-side cemetery plots. Does leaving his apartment late at night mean that he's having a rendezvous with a younger woman?

This "Rear Window" twist (co-scripted by Allen and "Annie Hall's" Marshall Brickman) keeps you guessing whether the man's crimes are genuine or just the figment of an overactive imagination. You can't tell, but the Hitchcock film when Carol searches the man's apartment while he's on his way up the elevator.

While Ted and Carol flirt with mystery and romance, Larry worries that his wife has grown psychotic. "Nothing that Prozac and a large polo mallet can't cure," he says only half-kidding.

Larry, meanwhile, finds himself attracted to a successful novelist (a wonderful bit by Anjelica Huston) who teaches him how to bluff in poker. She's smart, manipulative, strong-willed and after Larry. As in many of Allen's films, some of the most fascinating characters appear only in glimpses.

Allen again uses a handheld camera and a soundtrack of vintage jazz, including Benny Goodman's Carnegie Hall concert, where the red-hot climax of "Sing, Sing, Sing (With a Swing)" registers a couple of notches above the

level of the action. Perhaps as a response to personal troubles that could fill several movie dramas, he keeps the action especially lively and upbeat.

Surprisingly, unlike his moody, German-inspired "Shadows and Fog," Allen doesn't try to mimic the shadowy black-and-white visual style of the old mysteries. He does, however, offer clips from "Double Indemnity" and "The Lady From Shanghai."

One question remains unanswered long after the whodunnit in "Manhattan Murder Mystery" is solved: Will Allen ever run out of movies to pay tribute to?

"Manhattan Murder Mystery" is now showing at these suburban movie theaters: AMC Maple, AMC Woods, Showcase Pontiac and Star John R.

To leave a message for John



Murder mystery: Diane Keaton (left) and Woody Allen, in a scene from "Manhattan Murder Mystery."

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 —ROD LUCE, LOS ANGELES MAGAZINE

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 For fans of Grand Guignol, American Style
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"SUPERB"
 The most effective and entertaining Stephen King film ever!
 —Tom Scharif, RUSA RAMP

"GREAT FUN."
 Stephen King fans should squeal with glee over this one!
 —Dale Hoyle, SATELLITE NEWS NETWORK

Max von Sydow, who plays the film as a devil within, based on a short story by Frank Slaughter.
 —NEW YORK TIMES SUNDAY

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FILM CLIPS

"MANHATTAN MURDER MYSTERY"

Released by TriStar Pictures
 Starring: Woody Allen, Diane Keaton, Alan Alda, Anjelica Huston
 Directed by: Woody Allen
 Produced by: Robert Greenhut
 Screenplay by: Woody Allen and Marshall Brickman
 Running time: One hour, eight minutes
 Rated: PG (Some material may not be suitable for pre-teenagers)
 Rating (out of a possible four)

Key: Don't miss Strongly recommended Worth a look Wait for video

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