

## Menendez miasma goes prime time in Fox's 'Honor'

BY JEFF PLASS

What kind of commentary on American society is it when the best thing that can be said about a scandal-ridden, fact-based, made-for-television movie about sexual abuse, greed and premeditated murder is that it was entertaining?

Is society so jaded it must look incessantly to real-life misery for cheap thrills?

All things said and done, "Honor Thy Father and Mother: The True Story of the Menendez Murders," airing on Fox Monday, April 18, does no more to provide insight into the whys and wherefores of the Menendez murder case than three months of jury deliberations did in the real-life trial.

But at least it's entertaining.

Billy Warlock ("Baywatch") and newcomer David Beron star as the now-infamous siblings, Lyle and Erik Menendez, who murdered their parents, Jose and Kitty Menendez, on August 20, 1989.

"All I want is that this thing is entertaining," Warlock says. "Because I'll tell you, that's all we set out to do. You're not going to learn anything (from this movie) that you didn't already know."

Indeed.

Taken from trial transcripts, public records and the book "Blood Brothers" by John Johnson and Ronald L. Sobie, "Honor Thy Father and Mother" begins on the night of the murders and dramatizes the events that led up to the arrests of Erick and Lyle.

Warlock and Beron do a fine job of delivering the personalities viewers of Court TV have come to expect from the Menendez brothers. Warlock especially locks on to a particular side of the angrier, more manipulative brother, Lyle.

"What I hope comes across," Warlock states, "and it was something that I don't think the script had in it, but it suggested, was that he very much admired and respected his fa-

ther and wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. It just wasn't the strongest part of him."

The central question in the case, and by extension, the movie, was motive.

Did the Menendez brothers shoot their wealthy parents out of self-defense? They had threatened to go public with the sordid details of the years of sexual abuse their father made them endure, and they allegedly feared for their own safety.

Or did they just want the millions of dollars they stood to inherit without having to wait?

The movie does make one decision clear for the viewer. James Farentino's portrayal of Jose Menendez is so horrific, so monstrous, that one feels little sympathy for the character when he gets offed.

Whether or not Farentino gives a fair or accurate representation of the Menendez patriarch is now a moot point at best, as Jose will never have a chance to defend himself.

"James made a choice," Warlock states, "and who am I to say, I don't know how Jose Menendez was. Some of the testimony I saw from his co-workers said that was exactly how he was. Then there were a few others that said, 'No, hey, he was a nice guy.'"

"We'll never know."

"I will say that James playing Jose scared the living bejeebies out of me," Warlock adds. "I mean, he's intense, man. Oh, is he intense."

Farentino's depiction of Jose is intense and as entertainment, highly enjoyable, but in a fact-based film that contains the words "True Story" in the title, such a portrayal discredits the film's believability.

Actress Elaine Joyce appears in the film as Lyle's attorney, Jill Lansing.

"Let's face it," Joyce says, "whether the fury was swept away emotionally or not, the fact here is that these boys did kill their parents."

"And no matter what kind of a person Jose Menendez was, I don't think you can kill your parents, unless they were coming at you with a gun."

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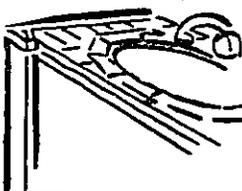
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