

Episode 1 - Crimes And Misdemeanors (1989)

MUSIC: Rosalie, by The Jazz Band

Introduction

CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS is the 18th film written and directed by WOODY ALLEN, first released in 1989.

It's two stories in one. The first is the trials of Judah, an eye doctor whose mistress is threatening to destroy his life, and the terrible choices he makes. The second is the trials of Cliff, whose search for meaning and meaningfulness is scuppered at every turn. Together their stories question justice and faith, and the existence of god itself.

This is one of Allen's most acclaimed dramas, and one of his most acclaimed films in general. It was also made in a period where Allen's complete creative control was at its most prevalent. He reshot around a third of the film, and he is still unhappy about the film to this day.

Welcome to the Woody Allen Pages podcast, from me, the creator of the Woody Allen Pages website. This week, episode one, we look at 1989's CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS. We'll look at how this film came to be. What I loved and didn't love. And then some fun trivia about the film. Of course, spoilers are everywhere.

JUDAH: I remember my father telling me, "The eyes of God are on us always." The eyes of God. What a phrase to a young boy. What were God's eyes like? Unimaginably penetrating, intense eyes, I assumed. And I wonder if it was just a coincidence I made my specialty ophthalmology.

Conception and story

The late 80s was one of Allen's most difficult periods. He had just made two back to back dramas and neither were particularly successful - 1987's SEPTEMBER and 1988's ANOTHER WOMAN. Both films had extensive rewrites, recasting and reshoots. He was notoriously tinkering and revising. And making very little concessions to the audience.

Allen had also tried to disappear from the public eye around this time. In fact, by this time, Allen hadn't actually appeared in one of his own films since HANNAH AND HER SISTERS in 1986, although he narrated 1987's RADIO DAYS.

There are almost no interviews from this period. Allen's acclaim and fame meant that his films marketed themselves, and his deal with ORION PICTURES meant that it didn't actually really matter if his films failed or not. He was usually already onto the next film - and Orion was banking on Allen in the long run.

CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS was one of the films that would make the flops worth it for Orion. Not only was Allen back on screen, he was also nominally the lead, something he wasn't in HANNAH AND HER SISTERS. But anyone looking for a charming romantic comedy starring one of America's funniest filmmakers would be in for a shock.

JUDAH: Now, it's funny I use the term "answered prayers". You see, I'm a man of science. I've always been a sceptic. But I was raised quite religiously. And while I challenged it, even as a child, some of that feeling must have stuck with me.

CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS was not an easy film to make. But it seems around this time, Allen was always making things difficult for himself. He was trying to break out of the comedy tag. Sometimes Allen knocks out a script in a couple of weeks and is filming just a couple of months later. This film, however, took a much longer journey.

Allen wrote the film whilst on a European holiday with MIA FARROW. He had started on the idea back in New York, but Allen wrote a bulk of the film on various bits of hotel stationery in countries like Sweden and Denmark. By the time he got home, he had a version of the script done. Some photos of that handwritten script was included in the ERIC LAX book CONVERSATIONS WITH WOODY ALLEN.

The original idea of the film was written under the working title of BROTHERS. Having focussed on sisterly relationships with HANNAH AND HER SISTERS, Allen flipped it to be about fraternal relationships. In fact, this film was, in many ways, a reaction to HANNAH AND HER SISTERS, where Allen felt he was too nice to the characters. Allen, of course, still hates that happy ending that he tacked onto HANNAH AND HER SISTERS. So this film is the dark mirror to HANNAH. No being nice. No happy ending.

As the working title of BROTHERS suggested, that first version focussed on the character of Judah Rosenthal, one of Allen's most interesting male leads. He is having an affair and his mistress has threatened to reveal all. When his

brother offers to organise a hired killer, Judah makes a terrible decision. Allen apparently based the brothers on real siblings that knew his occasional writing partner MARSHALL BRICKMAN, who co-wrote ANNIE HALL and MANHATTAN.

Judah appears to be a leading man, in charge of his agency, but he can't see his own flaws. He's a weasel, but he's played brilliantly by MARTIN LANDAU, who plays it straight.

It's really an incredible trick that Allen and Landau pulls off here. Judah is a prick - a grade A prick. He's cheating on his wife and he's taking advantage of the lonely Dolores, played wonderfully by ANJELICA HUSTON. Even Landau would ask of Allen - "why would anyone want to spend time with this asshole?".

Yet, we follow his journey, and he is sort of the hero of the film. We listen to his reasons, and only get one side of the story. We want him to succeed in his goals, because we watch films and we are used to wanting the person we spend the most time with getting their goals. And this guy's goal is to kill a woman and get away with it.

This really isn't the stuff of mainstream American cinema in the 1980s. The biggest films of 1989 featured Batman, Indiana Jones and Ghostbusters being good guys. Great characters, but good guys. Judah probably seems less groundbreaking now in a post-SOPRANOS, post-MAD MEN, post-BREAKING BAD kind of world. But there's more than little Judah Rosenthal in Tony Soprano, Don Draper and Walter White.

BEN: It's a human life. You don't think God sees?

JUDAH: God is a luxury I can't afford.

BEN: Now you're talking like your brother Jack.

JUDAH: Jack lives in the real world. You live in the kingdom of heaven. I'd managed to keep free of that real world but suddenly it's found me.

Of course, Judah's story is only part of the story. This film has two narratives that run in parallel, and the other involves Cliff Stern, played by WOODY ALLEN.

It's unclear to me whether Cliff's story was in the original version of BROTHERS. Allen has said over the years that he wished that the film was just the Judah storyline, suggesting a version of BROTHERS existed without the Cliff story.

But ORION PICTURES asked for Allen to write a part for himself. Allen has full creative control, but wanted to play nice with his studio, and agreed. It's not the first time ORION asked this - they asked Allen to consider starring in THE PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO. And his biggest box office hits of the 80s - like HANNAH AND HER SISTERS and BROADWAY DANNY ROSE - were the ones he

starred in. So he wrote a whole new storyline for a new character he could play, that would explore the same themes from a different angle. It doesn't seem that Allen ever considered the role of Judah for himself.

Cliff's story was originally completely different from what we see in the finished film. He was still a documentary filmmaker, but he was making a film about retired vaudeville performers in a retirement home. MIA FARROW's character worked there and ALAN ALDA's character has another love interest played by DARYL HANNAH. Allen actually shot and threw out that entire storyline. SEAN YOUNG and MERCEDES RUEHL had their scenes cut. DARYL HANNAH remains in just one scene.

Allen has never made it clear why he made such a significant change, other than his usual line about the film not working. He also told SEAN YOUNG that he didn't like the performances between him and her in the scenes they were in. But really, in this era of Allen's career, rewriting and reshooting half a film was part of doing business. 80 of the 139 scenes in the finished film were reshoots.

What Allen changed it to was Cliff being a documentary maker who takes a job making a profile on his shallow TV producer brother-in-law played by ALAN ALDA and loses his love in MIA FARROW. Both were now in totally new roles.

He's also making a documentary about a professor named Louis Levy, who was played by real New York University professor MARTIN BERGMANN. Amazingly, Bergmann improvised his own monologues.

PROFESSOR LEVY: Now the unique thing that happened to the early Israelites was that they conceived a God that cares. He cares, but at the same time he also demands that you behave morally. But here comes the paradox. What's one of the first things that that God asks: that God asks Abraham to sacrifice his only son, his beloved son to him. In other words, in spite of millennia of efforts we have not succeeded to create a really and entirely loving image of God. This was beyond our capacity to imagine.

Cliff's story lacks the stakes of Judah's. There's no life and death on the line. But it does follow the theme. There's no meaning, only tragedy in Cliff's life. And through the wonderful professor Levy, we get this incredible narrative about God and the meaning of life.

I said earlier that Allen has said that he wished that the Judah story was the whole film. His view is probably coloured by the difficulty of making the Cliff story. And let's face it - he kind of made the Judah only story in 2005 with MATCH POINT. And the Judah moments are by far the most engaging parts of the film. Allen throws so much incredible writing and filmmaking skill into telling the story of Judah.

The thing that gets me is how I'm never sure how much Judah is control here. Whenever I watch the scene of him and his brother Jack, played by JERRY ORBACH, first discuss the murder, I wonder if Judah is being led in, or doing the leading. He often tells Jack that he can't even consider murder, but is the one to always brings it up again. Even Jack says at one point that Judah only calls him for things like this.

JUDAH: Christ, Jack...what do you suggest?

JACK: What did you call me for?

JUDAH: I don't know. I'd hoped you had more experience with something like this.

JACK: You called me because you needed some dirty work done. That's all you ever call for.

JUDAH: Look how bitter you are.

JACK: Judah, you've staked me plenty of times. I don't forget my obligations.

JUDAH: Threatening her would only make it worse, Jack.

JACK: Ok. Forget about it. What do you want me to say?

JUDAH: How the hell can I forget about it? I'm fighting for my life. This woman's going to destroy everything that I've built.

JACK: That's what I'm saying, Judah. If the woman won't listen to reason, then you go on to the next step.

JUDAH: What? Threats? Violence? What are we talking about here?

JACK: She can be gotten rid of. I mean, I know a lot of people. Money will buy whatever's necessary.

JUDAH: I'm not even going to comment on that! That's crazy!

JACK: Well, what did you want me to do when you called me?

JUDAH: Not to do dirty work... despite what you think. Anyway, it's gone beyond just Miriam, now. She's talking financial doings. I'm out of ideas.

There's really not enough good things I can say about Judah. He's this sort of INGMAR BERGMAN character - with his white hair and his privileged veneer that only thinly hides his emotional panic. He's also very philosophical. Leading men in American films tend to not be so forthright with God and meaning. It's so much more Swedish.

Another moment that kills me is much more subtle. ANGELICA HUSTON plays Dolores, Judah's mistress and blackmailer. And at one point in an argument with Judah, she says that she won't let this happen to her - again.

JUDAH: I mean, I can't go on leading two lives.

DOLORES: Yeah, well, you're not doing her any favor by pretending with her. I'm not going to be without you. I'm not going to let this happen to me without a fight!

JUDAH: Wait a minute, listen.

DOLORES: I wanna speak to Miriam! I'm not gonna let this happen again.

JUDAH: Dolores, nothing is happening, all right?

DOLORES: No.

JUDAH: Yes. Now, listen to me, please. Just bear with me. We'll work something out.

It's just one word in a frantic scene. But we catch it and we see that this is the kind of person she is. She is easily led on and vulnerable. But she's also bitter from past experience. Incredible character development, with just one word.

Allen's dramas to date had been very straightforward. The director who played with time and linear narratives so well in ANNIE HALL or ZELIG seems to disappear when he put on the drama hat. Here he loosens up and adds a couple of incredible scenes of magical realism. One is using the character of Ben, a rabbi played by SAM WATERSTON, as a sort of conscience ghost, in a scene where Judah is otherwise alone.

BEN: Could you really go through with it?

JUDAH: What choice do I have, Ben? Tell me.

BEN: Give the people that you've hurt a chance to forgive you.

JUDAH: Miriam won't forgive me. She'll be broken. She worships me. She'll be humiliated before our friends. This woman plans to make a stink.

BEN: Did you make promises to her?

JUDAH: No. Maybe I led her on more than I realized. She... She's so emotionally hungry. But it's deeper than just Miriam, now.

BEN: Meaning financial improprieties?

JUDAH: No. Maybe I... Maybe I did make some questionable moves.

Another is very Ingmar Bergman-esque. Judah travels to his family home and actually steps into the past to discuss morality with his family.

SEDER GUEST #1: What are you saying, May? There's no morality anywhere in the whole world?

MAY: Listen, for those who want morality, there's morality. Nothing's handed down in stones.

SEDER GUEST #2: Sol's kind of faith is a gift. It's like an, an ear for music or the talent to draw. He believes, and you can use logic on him all day long, and he still believes.

SOL: Must everything be logical?

JUDAH: If a man commits a crime, if he kills.

SOL: Then one way or another, he will be punished.

SEDER GUEST #3: If he's caught, Sol.

SOL: If he's not caught, that which originates from a black deed will blossom in a foul manner.

SEDER GUEST #3: Eh, you're relying a little too heavily on the Bible, Sol.

SOL: No, no, no, no. Whether it's the, uh, the Old Testament or Shakespeare, murder will out.

JUDAH: Who said anything about murder?

SOL: You did.

And it's worth noting that the Judah storyline was not free from Allen's ruthless reshooting either. Judah's brother Jack was recast after another actor had filmed scenes - and rewritten. He apparently played a bigger role when the film was initially envisioned as BROTHERS.

Whatever Allen originally envisaged, all the rewrites changed the film significantly, and the title of Brothers no longer fit. The characters of SAM WATERSTON's Ben and ALAN ALDA's Lester being brothers is only barely commented upon, and has no bearing on the film. And far from being a dark drama, this film has many of Allen's characteristic one liners, something very much missing from his last few films.

CLIFF: I think I see a cab. If we run quickly, we can kick the crutch from that old lady and get it.

By making this film two narratives, Allen achieves a much deeper range of emotions than just the Judah story. He overcomes the problem he had in dramas like the recent SEPTEMBER or ANOTHER WOMAN. Those films had a very restrictive palette. But there's no mopey European-ness going on here.

The Professor Levy character is especially poetic and when he dies, it gives the film an emotional wallop. It makes you want to cry. And that's not something that Allen has done much of, up to this point. Cliff's journey is that he is desperate for meaning. He throws himself into making a documentary about Levy, who is such a hopeful person. But when he commits suicide, that hope snaps away.

PROFESSOR LEVY: You will notice that what we are aiming at when we fall in love is a very strange paradox. The paradox consists of the fact that when we fall in love, we are seeking to re-find all or some of the people to whom we were attached as children. On the other hand, we ask our beloved to correct all of the wrongs that these early parents or siblings inflicted on upon us, so that love contains in it the contradiction, the attempt to return to the past and the attempt to undo the past.

It also allows for Allen to craft some relatability to the story. Because Judah is so rich and privileged, it's hard for us to feel sorry for him. Cliff has better intentions - perhaps the best of intentions - so we like him. You think for Judah - but you feel for Cliff. In Cliff, we have someone to cling to in this film. But there is no happy ending for either men.

Speaking of endings, the film's climax is one of Allen's best scenes. When Judah and Cliff sit down and talk about morality in fiction and happy endings. This was supposed to be a conversation between Judah and the blind rabbi Ben. That would have been another very serious conversation between two characters we've seen interact before.

Now with Woody Allen's Cliff there, it's something else. Less serious, same conclusion. Allen is critical of his own acting range, but here, you can see the spark of his intelligence wanting to take apart the problem, and being oblivious to the man who is almost slipping into a confession. Through it all, the themes of the film are served on a platter.

CLIFF: Here's what I would do. I would have him turn himself in. 'Cause then you see, then your story assumes tragic proportions. Because in the absence of a God or something, he is forced to assume that responsibility himself. Then you have... Then you have tragedy.

JUDAH: But that's fiction, that's movies. I mean... I mean, you've seen too many movies. I mean, I'm talking about reality. I mean, if you want a happy ending, you should go see a Hollywood movie.

Then there's the eyes. Allen weaves in this incredible symbolism throughout the film. Judah is an eye doctor. The characters don't see themselves for what they are. And there's the question of God, and if anyone is watching over us. Allen throws in a blind Rabbi who is the moral spine of the story, yet can't see a thing either.

Allen dropped the title BROTHERS because there was a TV sit-com called BROTHERS. So Allen came up with many alternative titles, which he told to his biographer ERIC LAX. They include several that talk about eyes like THE EYES OF GOD and WINDOWS OF THE SOUL. There were other big sounding titles too like A MATTER OF CHOICE or ACTS OF GOOD AND EVIL.

DOLORES: My mother said that I should go to the doctor.

JUDAH: Uh-huh.

DOLORES: 'Cause I was, you know, my eyes weren't so good. Well, you're an ophthalmologist.

JUDAH: Yeah.

DOLORES: Do you agree the eyes are the windows of the soul?

JUDAH: Well, I believe they're windows, but I'm not sure it's the soul they see.

DOLORES: My mother taught me I have a soul. And it will live on after me when I'm gone. And if you look deeply enough in my eyes, you can see it.

HIGH CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS was considered and dismissed. Dropping the high and just CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS was ultimately what Woody settled on. The final title also alluded to the influence of FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY on the film. The Russian writer wrote big morality tales, including the similarly titled CRIME AND PUNISHMENT.

Production, cast and crew

Allen's approach to dramas has been to dial down the music. It's true here, where the score stays out of the way. Allen sticks to music used in the story - diegetic music used in some of the films that Cliff watches with his niece, or played at parties. The neat trick Allen uses for the spare score is to have different music for the two stories. Cliff's take is scored by jazz that is more closely associated with Allen, while Judah's story has rich, ominous classical music.

What is great is how Allen plays around with contrast. After the scene where Judah speaks to some strange ghost of God portrayed by his Rabbi friend Ben, we cut straight into SWEET GEORGIA BROWN, which many people know as the music for the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS.

Allen uses clips from old films to break up the bleakness. He uses bits from forties films like THIS GUN FOR HIRE and MR AND MRS SMITH, which is supposed to be what Cliff sees at the cinema. The clips are always a burst of energy after a slow scene, again playing with contrasts. And all the clips subtly play on the scene that came before it. Like the scene from THIS GUN FOR HIRE, where two men are plotting a murder.

WILLARD GATES: Don't tell me! I don't want to know anything about it.

TOMMY: This is a work of art. The ropes come off. I tie sash weights to her ankles with soft catgut.

WILLARD GATES: Please. That's a horrible word.

TOMMY: Now get the angle on this! She disappears - two weeks, maybe three, then up she pops. None of this stuff on her anymore. No marks - a suicide. Now isn't that beautiful?

WILLARD GATES: It's loathsome.

You don't get much more juxtaposition than using SINGIN' IN THE RAIN in a film about murder and God. The music from that cheery film is actually used in the strange trailer.

The cast is excellent. Allen at this point gave no care to box office draw and could get just about anyone. He preferred to work with people he knew and trusted. Mia, of course, was in every film around this time. JOANNA GLEASON and SAM WATERSTON also return, having very recently been in other Allen films.

ANJELICA HUSTON is great as Dolores Paley. Huston comes from an acting dynasty that includes her dad, legendary director JOHN HUSTON. She had earned acclaim for her role in her father's film PRIZZI'S HONOR in 1985, but was not yet a household name.

Huston reckons she was cast against type. She has said that if you were to read the role, you might assume that the mistress was some seductive blonde (probably not unlike Nora from MATCH POINT, Allen's very similar film in 2005). She is great in the role and it kicked off an incredible 90s for Huston, where she starred in blockbusters like THE WITCHES and THE ADDAMS FAMILY, as well as working with Allen again in MANHATTAN MURDER MYSTERY.

JUDAH: Why did you phone me?

DOLORES: I told you I'd call you. I couldn't help it. I was going out of my skin. I have to see you later. I have to. Okay. After work is okay.

ALAN ALDA is also great. He is best known for his role in MASH, which finished up in 1983 and had one of the most watched TV finales of all time. Allen notoriously doesn't pay very much, but people like Alda had earned a fortune in TV and could do whatever he wanted. And he wanted to work with Woody Allen. A lot of huge TV stars worked with Allen in these years.

Alda's character of Lester was based on LARRY GELBART, comedy writer of films like TOOTSIE and the creator of MASH. Gelbart and Allen crossed paths in the 60s, and both men had written for SID CAESAR. Gelbart has said that the ALDA character in MASH was an idealised version of himself. So here's Alda, playing another version of Gelbart. Allen has said that Gelbart was the best comedy writer that he has ever known.

Alda's role on paper seems a bit thankless - and Allen has created these male buffoon figures before and would again. Think of MICHAEL SHEEN in MIDNIGHT IN PARIS, or HUGH GRANT in SMALL TIME CROOKS. But Alda makes his character of Lester likeable - and we don't know if Cliff is right about him. Casting Alda gives a great dimension to the character - because it's not easy to hate ALAN ALDA.

LESTER: And what makes New York such a funny place, is that there's so much tension and pain and misery and craziness here. And they got...That's the first part of comedy. But see, you got to get some distance from it. You know what I mean? That the main...The thing to remember about comedy is, if it's... If it bends, it's funny. If it breaks, it's not funny. So you gotta get back from the pain. You see what I mean? But the... The, uh...Like they said, they asked me up in, uh, at Harvard, a bunch of kids asked me, "Why... What's comedy?" So, I said... And then this is...This is part of what I'm trying to say about getting back from it. I said, "comedy is tragedy plus time." Tragedy plus time. See, when... The night Lincoln was shot, you couldn't joke about it. You couldn't make a joke about that. You just couldn't do it. Now time has gone by, and now it's fair game. See what I mean? It's tragedy plus time.

CLIFF: Okay. We're out.

But it's all MARTIN LANDAU. Landau had been working as an actor since the 50s in lots of TV roles. In 1988, he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his work in FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA's film TUCKER: THE MAN AND HIS DREAM. Landau scored his second Oscar nomination with CRIMES AND MISDEMANORS, just a year later.

In any conversation about the best male leads in an Allen film, Landau is up there. His performance is worth repeated visits. You can see the way he talks himself into evil, and justifies his actions. It's a masterful, layered performance. At times confident and strong, at times weasely and weak. And so much going on behind the eyes.

Allen loved working with Landau. He would say that for some reason Landau just clicked with his dialogue. He would always deliver the lines as Allen envisaged. Allen would later learn that Landau grew up quite close to him, and they shared a regional, neighbourhood syntax.

Landau's nomination didn't lead to a win, but he would finally win that Oscar in 1994 for his work in ED WOOD.

JACK: For Christ's sake, Judah, you're having a breakdown.

JUDAH: The police know she phoned me a lot. I lied, but I know they saw through it. I can't take this, Jack. This is not for me.

JACK: If you don't pull yourself together, you're gonna blow the whole thing.

JUDAH: Well, I did it, and it's irrevocable, and now I'm gonna pay. Jack, I had to fight an urge just to make a clean breast of it to the police. I want this off my mind.

JACK: Listen to me, Judah, I'm in this with you. I helped you out and I don't wanna go to jail for it. Now, you get these ideas about confessing and you may not care whether you drag me down with you. But I'm telling you right now, I'm not gonna let that happen.

Perhaps all that reshooting was easy because by the late 80s, Allen was settled with his team, most of whom had worked with him for over a decade. The names familiar in the credits to every Woody Allen fan. ROBERT GREENHUT producing. JULIET TAYLOR in casting. SUSAN E MORSE in editing. SANTO LOQUASTO doing the production design.

Behind the camera is SVEN NYKVIST, the Swedish cinematographer favoured by INGMAR BERGMAN. It's his second film with Allen, following on from ANOTHER WOMAN, released just a year earlier in 1988.

Nykvist can do everything, but his specialty, what he's remembered for, is setting up these moody atmospheres and shooting actors as they make their way around the spaces. This film excels in some of the long moody scenes in Judah's story. Judah and Jack discussing murder at his house or Judah and Ben discussing blackmail in his office.

BEN: Can't you break it off?

JUDAH: The woman won't allow it. She's young. She's very unstable. She's an hysteric. And vindictive. And it's my fault. I instigated it. I prolonged it. Many times I tried to back off, but I was too weak. But I promised her nothing. But did I? See, I don't even know anymore. In the heat of passion, you say things. All I know is, after two years of shameful deceit, where I led this double life, I awakened as if from a dream and realized what I'd be losing.

Release and reception

CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS was released by ORION PICTURES on 13th October 1989. This was his ninth film for Orion, who was very protective of Allen. He hadn't had a big hit since HANNAH AND HER SISTERS and the next couple would be significant flops. Orion would also go bankrupt in the next couple of years.

Still, this film was a pretty successful for Allen. It would be his most successful film in the 80s after HANNAH AND HER SISTERS. And of course, it was loved by critics and swept its share of awards for its cast. Allen himself was nominated for Best Director and Best Screenplay at that year's Academy Awards.

For me, this film is great - one of the upper echelons of Woody Allen's work. Allen seems to be overflowing with ideas for this film. Rich characters, a lot to say and some incredible filmmaking flair all comes together. And for the first time, he's made a drama that matches the energy of his comedies, which are often overflowing with ideas as well.

Then there are the details. Allen has talked often about trying to construct a film that has the level of detail of a novel. It's a big obsession for him in the 80s, and this works better than most. Allen layers on the themes, subtext and symbolism into every frame. He uses contrast to make emotional points. The dialogue is top notch. And it helps that his cast is incredible, as is his crew.

Interestingly, in 2012, UK's SIGHT AND SOUND magazine polled hundreds of directors for their favourite films. And the highest ranking Woody Allen film was a tie between CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS and MANHATTAN. Both beat ANNIE HALL.

So CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS is one of Woody Allen's best. And of that pool of the best films, it's by far Allen's most serious. It will take him another decade and half but Allen would start to finally make serious, intense dramas in the 2000s. But I'm still not sure any of those top this one. There's some fine films in his very serious work to come. But here, he's casually serious. Talking about God and justice, with wit and flair.

PROFESSOR LEVY: But we must always remember that when we are born we need a great deal of love to persuade us to stay in life. Once we get that love, it usually lasts us. But the universe is a pretty cold place. It's we who invest it with our feelings. And under certain conditions, we feel that the thing isn't worth it anymore.

Fun facts

Here's a couple of fun facts about CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS.

JENNY NICHOLS plays Cliff's niece who he takes to see films. She is the least accomplished actor to get name billing on a Woody Allen film.

She is the daughter of director MIKE NICHOLS, who shared a manager with Woody. She only appeared in two other films - an extra in RAGTIME eight years earlier, and a small part in NEW YORK STORIES, also in 1989 and also involved Allen. She just didn't pursue acting at all after this film. Which is funny because one of her lines in the film is saying she wants to grow up to be an actress.

JENNY: I think maybe when I'm older I wanna be an actress.

CLIFF: I don't want you to be an actress. I want you to be on the Supreme Court or a doctor or something. You know, show business is, is dog eat dog. It's worse than dog eat dog. It's, it's dog doesn't return other dog's phone calls. You know, which is terrible.

JERRY ORBACH replaced STEPHEN HILL in the role of Jack. The two would later star together for many years on LAW AND ORDER alongside SAM WATERSTON. Waterston appeared in 368 episodes, Orbach for 274 episodes and Hill for 229 episodes. Other Law And Order stars that have worked with Allen include CAROLYN MCCORMACK, DIANNE WIEST and JK SIMMONS.

Professor Levy was originally a character for the film that would be ANNIE HALL, but actually ties into MANHATTAN MURDER MYSTERY. We'll get around to those two films - but ANNIE HALL started as a murder mystery, with a Professor Levy committing suicide. But our heroes know better, because they knew that he was an optimist and so they start investigating.

Outro

Thanks for listening to this first episode of the Woody Allen Pages podcast.

Next week - we look at a film that I think is one of Woody Allen's very best, but most people seem to disagree with me.

LESTER: If it bends it's funny. If it breaks it's not funny.

Music and clip credits

Rosalie (1937), performed by The Jazz Band.

English Suite No. 2 in A minor (1722), performed by Alicia De Larrocha.

Sweet Georgia Brown (1925), performed by Coleman Hawkins and His All-Star Jam Band.

All I Do Is Dream of You (1934), from the Soundtrack of 'Singin' in the Rain'.