

9th October 2000**The Insider (15)**Director: Michael Mann
USA 1999

Running time:- 158 minutes.

LEADING PLAYERS: Al Pacino (Lowell Bergman), Russell Crowe (Jeffrey Wigand), Christopher Plummer (Mike Wallace), Diane Venora (Liane Wigand), Philip Baker Hall (Don Hewitt), Lindsay Crouse (Sharon Tiller), Gina Gershon (Helen Caperelli), Michael Gambon (Thomas Sandefur), Rip Torn (John Scanlon), Wings Hauser (tobacco lawyer). SCRIPT- Eric Roth, Michael Mann, based on the Vanity Fair article "The Man Who Know Too Much" by Marie Brenner. PHOTOGRAPHY- Dante Spinotti. MUSIC- Pieter Bourke, Lisa Gerrard. SOUNDTRACK- "Tempest" by Lisa Gerrard, Madjid Khaladj, Pieter Bourke; "Uotaaref men elihabek" by J. Baird, F. Gari; "Suffocate", "Night Spot", "Hot Spots" by/performed by Curt Sobel; "Litany" by/performed by Arvo Pärt; "Smokey Mountain Waltz" by/performed by Richard Gilks; "Iguazu" by/performed by Gustavo Santaolla; "Armenia" by Blixa Bargeld, Alexander Hacke, J. Caffery, F.M. Strauss, Andrew Chudy, Mark Chung; "Sacrifice" by/performed by Lisa Gerrard, Pieter Bourke; "Two or Three Things" by David Darling; "Rites" by/performed by Jan Garbarek; "Safe from Harm (Perfecto mix)" by Billy Cobham, Robert Del Naja, Grantley Marshall, Shara Nelson, Andrew Vowles.

Mark Kermode in his March 2000 *Sight and Sound* review said: '...*The Insider* ought to walk off with a basket of Oscars in March.' He goes on to say, of course, that it won't (and it didn't) and that Michael Mann and his movie 'should be proud to be outsiders.'

The fact is that the reason *The Insider* did not gain a single Oscar was because it was too risky. It treated a subject (whether or not the tobacco industry was involved in chemically treating its cigarettes to enhance their addictive properties) which was in its way as political as the equally neglected, and equally brilliant, *Bulworth* last year. It used as its basis a current affairs article and named names. Result: few people in Ipswich, or elsewhere outside London, can have had a chance to see this film, which was rapidly eclipsed on its release by the admittedly arresting *American Beauty* and the trivial efficiency of *The Talented Mr Ripley*.

A word about Michael Mann. Famous, some would prefer infamous, as the creator of *Miami Vice*, his feature film work has lent towards more challenging themes while retaining the surface sheen of that cops and robbers series. *Manhunter* (1988) anticipated *The Silence of the Lambs* in being a film about serial killers with Hannibal Lector as touchstone, but had a cop who was as screwed up as his quarry. *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) brought visceral excitement to the costume adventure and *Heat* (1995, also with Pacino) returned to the hunter/hunted identification of *Manhunter* while returning the urban thriller to the chic of *Bullitt* after years of *French Connection* grittiness.

All his films demonstrate Mann's qualities as a stickler for detail, a director ready to take a chance with a shot, holding it for longer than most

would dare, and someone who likes to get inside the psyche of the macho male (pardon the tautology). The classic Mann shot has one of his characters silhouetted against a landscape, set below an evening sky in contemplation of his destiny, all with sensuous electronic music over the top. He is the thinking man's action movie director.

The Insider is in a way a change of direction: this is not an action film but an investigation, in the manner of *All the President's Men* or *JFK*. The setting is TV and the programme *Sixty Minutes*. Bergman (Pacino), the show's producer, receives anonymous documents casting dubious light on the tobacco industry and approaches Wigand (Crowe), a recently fired research and development employee for Brown and Williamson. And so it goes, the familiar twists and turns followed with precision and without condescension to melodrama or hyperbole. B&W sweat and threaten, CBS loses its cool, individual integrity is on the line. We've been here before, as so often in the movies, but rarely with such conviction and professionalism.

Pacino continues his recent spate of plum roles with a super performance as the man at the controls, a part he has made his own since *The Godfather Part Two*. Russell Crowe, in a part quite different to that in this Summer's *Gladiator*, is a stocky, greying, reluctant hero, and more than fulfils the promise of *LA Confidential*. The supporting cast, from Plummer's unctuous presenter to Gershon's acid corporate lawyer, all pull their weight, no doubt glad to be speaking a literate script for a director with a vision.

David Clare