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ANGEL'S DANCE

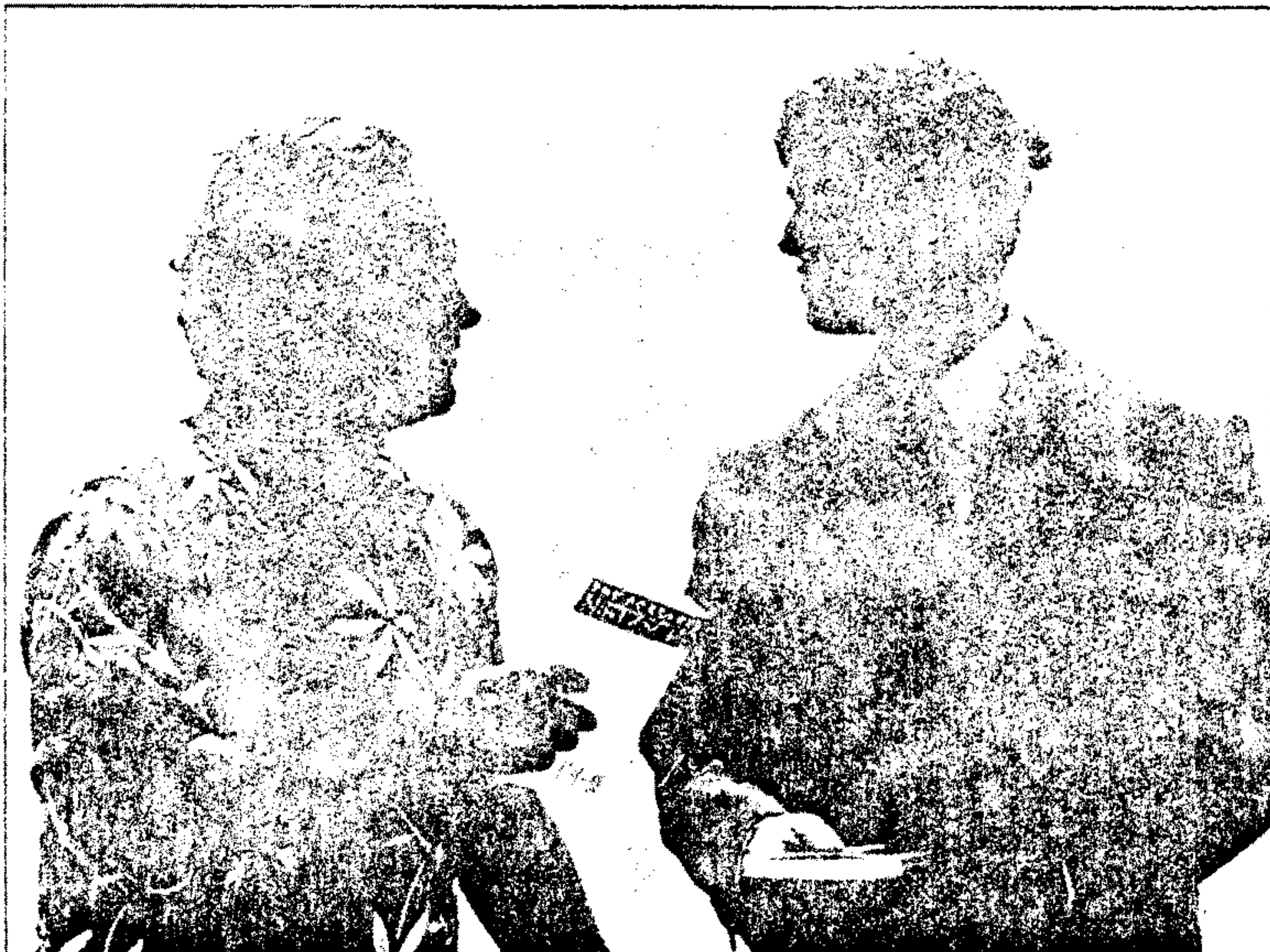
(ACTION COMEDY)

A Promark Entertainment Group presentation. Produced by David Bixler. Executive producer, Jon Kramer. Co-producer, John Glasser.

Directed, written by David L. Corley. Camera (color), Micheal Wojciechowski; editor, Sean Albertson; music, Tim Truman; production designer, Bonnie Stauch; costume designer, Patti Podesta; line producer, Kelli Konop; associate producer, Amy Krell; assistant director, John Nelson; casting, Rick Montgomery, Joe Louis Garcia. **Reviewed at Cinequest Film Festival, San Jose, Feb. 25, 1999.** Running time: **102 MIN.**

Steven Rosellini James Belushi
Angelica Chaste Sheryl Lee
Tony Kyle Chandler
Nick Frank John Hughes
Police Detective Ned Beliamy
Bob Mark Carlton
Norman Mac Davis
Uncle Vinnie Jon Polito
Accountant David Bickford

By DENNIS HARVEY



MASTER OF MAYHEM: *Jim Belushi plays a legendary killer who gives lessons to a reluctant recruit (Kyle Chandler) in "Angel's Dance."*

A diverting, if just half-successful, attempt to put a fresh spin on the now-familiar mix of hit men and black comedy, "Angel's Dance" shifts the central p.o.v. to a female character — then doesn't develop her well enough to make that refreshing switch pay off as well as it should. Toplining James Belushi and Sheryl Lee, feature looks iffy as a theatrical item, but should do OK in rental and broadcast markets.

After he saves the life of a top-ranking Mafioso's nephew, monosyllabic young East Coast tough guy Tony (Kyle Chandler) is rewarded by getting invited to join "The Family." Reluctantly accepting, he's packed off to California for a sort of one-on-one master class with the elusive, legendary killer Rosellini (Belushi). But Tony is appalled by the latter, whose goofy idea of criminal education includes Nietzsche reading assignments, Zen koans and preparatory squirt-gun "hits."

Rosellini thinks one can become a true assassin only by first intentionally offing a total innocent, thus numbing that inconvenient conscience-thing forevermore. Ergo, Tony picks a name at random out of the L.A. phone book. He comes up with one Angelica, aka Angel Chase (Lee), an attractive, highly stressed young kook with a Goth-rock look, a senile father, a doll she treats as her "baby" and a house next to the mortuary where she works.

She's spooky, and spooked — Tony's first murder attempt, in fact, interrupts Angel's latest suicide effort. But once she realizes someone's out to kill her, the woman reveals unexpectedly resourceful, stubborn, even bloodthirsty aspects of her personality. Rosellini recognizes a worthy foe; Tony, meanwhile, is smitten.

Eventually mob personnel fly in from the East to further complicate matters for the rather routine final shootout. This seg ends, however, with a left-field twist that's perhaps ill advised, since it turns Angel's new-found resiliency into a cynical joke.

Lee is game as usual, though director David L. Corley's script could have lavished far more detail and invention on what turns out to be a rather abrupt, one-dimensional transition to La Femme Nikita (complete with spike heels and blond wig). A more droll actor than Belushi might have better exploited potential of film's most original character conceit, though guru-of-mayhem Rosellini still provides some eccentric laughs. Chandler is appropriately broody.

Given that story's credibility factor is low from get-go, pic would have been better off chucking its more restrained, occasionally serious aspects (the pathos of Angel's mental instability) in favor of flat-out farce. Middling result is neither terribly funny nor suspenseful, but it does hold interest nonetheless. Tech package is undistinguished.