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Crimes And Misdemeanors

New York An Orion Pictures release of a Jack Rollins and Charles H. Joffe production. Executive producers, Rollins, Joffe. Produced by Robert Greenhut. Written and directed by Woody Allen. Camera (Duart color; Deluxe prints), Sven Nykvist; editor, Susan E. Morse; music, various; sound, Frank Graziadei; production design, Santo Loquasto; art direction, Speed Hoptins; set decoration, Susan Bode; costume design, Jeffrey Kurland; production manager, Joseph Hartwick; assistant director, Thomas Reilly; associate producers, Reilly, Helen Robin; casting, Juliet Taylor. Reviewed at Loews Tower East, Oct. 5, 1989. (In Denver Intl. Film Festival.) MPAA Rating: PG-13. Running time: 104 MIN.

Judah Rosenthal	.....	Martin Landau
Cliff Stern	.....	Woody Allen
Halley Reed	.....	Mia Farrow
Lester	.....	Alan Alda
Dolores Paley	.....	Anjelica Huston
Ben	.....	Sam Waterston
Wendy Stern	.....	Joanna Gleason
Barbara	.....	Caroline Aaron
Jack Rosenthal	.....	Jerry Orbach
Miriam Rosenthal	.....	Claire Bloom
Sharon Rosenthal	.....	Stephanie Roth
Jenny	.....	Jenny Nichols
Sol Rosenthal	.....	David S. Howard
Aunt May	.....	Anna Berger
Detective	.....	Victor Argo
Prof. Louis Levy	.....	Martin Bergmann
Lisa	.....	Daryl Hannah

■ **Woody Allen ambitiously mixes his two favored strains of cinema, melodrama and comedy, with mixed results in "Crimes And Misdemeanors." Laudable effort is unlikely to break his or Orion's losing streak at the box-office.**

Two loosely linked stories here concern eye doctor Martin Landau and documentary director Allen, each facing moral dilemmas. The structural and stylistic conceit is that when Landau is onscreen, the film is dead serious, even solemn (harking back to Allen's controversial series of Ingmar Bergmanesque pictures starting with "Interiors"), while Allen's own appearance onscreen signals hilarious satire and priceless 1-liners.

What makes this odd mix interesting is that both halves of the piece, presented in alternating scenes, deal with an ethical Big Theme borrowed from Bergman, namely, correct human behavior in a modern, godless world. Unfortunately, the characters' specific problem is banal and unnatural dialog (a failing of Allen's recent flops "September" and "Another Woman"), making Landau's story needlessly remote.

Landau's problem is simple: His mistress (Anjelica Huston, shrill in an underwritten role) threatens to go to his wife (Claire Bloom) and reveal all, including Landau's previous embezzlement activities. At wit's end, he seeks the assistance of his ne'er-do-well brother (Jerry Orbach), who orders up a hitman from out of town to waste Huston.

Meanwhile, Allen, unhappily married to Joanna Gleason, has fallen in love with tv documentary producer Mia Farrow, whom he meets while directing a tv docu profiling his enemy and brother-in-law, Alan Alda. Alda is perfect casting as a successful tv comedy producer, whose pompous attitude and easy romantic victories with women (including Farrow) exasperate Allen. Though portrayed as filled with sour grapes and

envy, Allen's plight is basically sympathetic.

Picture uses several subplots effectively, notably the plight of Sam Waterston (excellent in an unusual characterization) as the Landau family rabbi who's tragically going blind; and Allen's frequent visits to the Bleecker St. Cinema to watch old movies with his cute adolescent niece (Jenny Nichols). Also helping to knit themes together is the subject of Allen's serious, longrange docu project, a philosophy professor (played by Martin Bergmann) whose pronouncements give both the characters and audience food for thought, especially when this life-affirming guy commits suicide.

Landau's thesping is another career milestone, following his Oscar-nomination performance last year in Francis Coppola's "Tucker." He creates and holds one's interest in a selfish character who, defying all dramatic conventions, becomes increasingly corrupt and even learns to live with his evil and guilt rather than overcoming them. Huston is less fortunate, unable to make much of a merely functional character, while Allen fails to provide any interesting scenes for Bloom to play in the role of his wife.

An homage to Bergman's "Wild Strawberries," when Landau improbably visits his ancestral home and walks into a seder ceremony from 40 years ago, is well-acted but far too blunt in laying the film's themes on the table. In this scene, as elsewhere, yellow-tinted visuals by Bergman's great collaborator Sven Nykvist (who did not lens "Strawberries," a Gunnar Fischer assignment) superbly stylize the action. A background score of standards ranging from Irving Berlin and Cole Porter to classical pieces is effective, though several Landau segments are overly austere sans underscoring.

Allen fans will enjoy, following his screen return in "New York Stories," another taste of the comedian's vintage nebbish character. Farrow, in her 10th straight Allen feature, provides a warm center. Besides Waterston's standout role, there is topnotch support by Gleason and Anna Berger as Landau's Aunt May (in the seder flashback). Daryl Hannah pops up (uncredited) as one of Alda's aspiring tv actresses in a party scene. —Lor.