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SWEET AND LOWDOWN

Directed by Woody Allen

Cast: Sean Penn, Samantha Morton, Uma Thurman, Anthony LaPaglia, Woody Allen, John Waters.

USA, 1999.
In English.

95 mins. Color.

Rental: Apply.

New Release



Sweet and Lowdown is a Woody Allen show-biz tall tale in the vein of *Broadway Danny Rose*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, and *Bullets Over Broadway*. Featuring Oscar-nominated performances by Sean Penn and Samantha Morton, this bittersweet period romance is sweetened by Allen's affection for the 1930s jazz milieu and given grit by one of the most outrageously obnoxious protagonists in movie-comedy history. The dubious hero is Emmett Ray, a legendary jazz guitarist who illustrates the mysterious and sometimes downright ridiculous misalliance between art and artist. Onstage, Emmett plays like an angel. Offstage he behaves like a schmuck—a vain, inconsiderate boor whose favorite pastime is shooting rats at the city dump. The self-centered musician comes perilously close to commitment when he meets Hallie, a laundress who is, as he so gallantly puts it, "a goddam mute orphan halfwit." Enchanted by Emmett's few gifts and indulgent of his numerous flaws, Hallie follows him through a rootless, romantic Depression world of roadhouses, boardwalks, auto courts, amusement parks, and train crossings—photographed in rich autumnal hues by master colorist Zhao Fei (*Raise the Red Lantern*). Their rocky road includes a trip to Hollywood, a detour with a thrill-seeking heiress (Uma Thurman), and a slapstick shootout with gangsters. Sean Penn's daring performance gives Emmett a saving touch of sympathy without sentimentalizing the character, and Samantha Morton, whose eloquent face evokes Harpo Marx and Giulietta Masina, spices her angelic role with earthy appetites and goofy humor.

"It's the prettiest movie of the year, maybe of Allen's career ... The film also has a great jazz score, a bunch of funny lines, a fabulous running gag, and a spectacular performance by Sean Penn." — Amy Taubin, *The Village Voice*.

"Sean Penn does for Woody Allen what De Niro did for Scorsese in *Raging Bull*... Allen's best picture in a decade or more." — David Denby, *The New Yorker*.