

## Document Citation

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CANNES

MATCH POINT

(U.K.)

A BBC Films and Thema Prod. presentation of a Jada production. (International sales: HanWay Films, London.) Produced by Letty Aronson, Gareth Wiley, Lucy Darwin. Executive producer, Stephen Tenenbaum. Co-producers, Helen Robin, Nicky Kentish Barnes. Co-executive producers, Jack Rollins, Charles H. Joffe.

Directed, written by Woody Allen. Camera (Technicolor), Remi Adefarasin; editor, Alisa Lepselter; production designer, Jim Clay; art directors, Diane Dancklefsen, Jan Spoczynski; set decorator, Caroline Smith; costume designer, Jill Taylor; sound (Dolby), Peter Glossop; supervising sound editor, Robert Hein; re-recording mixer, Lee Dichter; assistant director, Chris Newman; casting, Juliet Taylor, Gail Stevens, Patricia Kerrigan DiCerto. **Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (noncompeting)**, May 12, 2005. Running time: 124 MIN.

Nola Rice ..... Scarlett Johansson  
Chris Wilton ..... Jonathan Rhys Meyers  
Chloe Hewett Wilton ..... Emily Mortimer  
Tom Hewett ..... Matthew Goode  
Alec Hewett ..... Brian Cox  
Eleanor Hewett ..... Penelope Wilton  
Inspector Dowd ..... Ewen Bremner  
Detective Banner ..... James Nesbitt  
Henry ..... Rupert Penry-Jones  
Mrs. Eastby ..... Margaret Tyzack

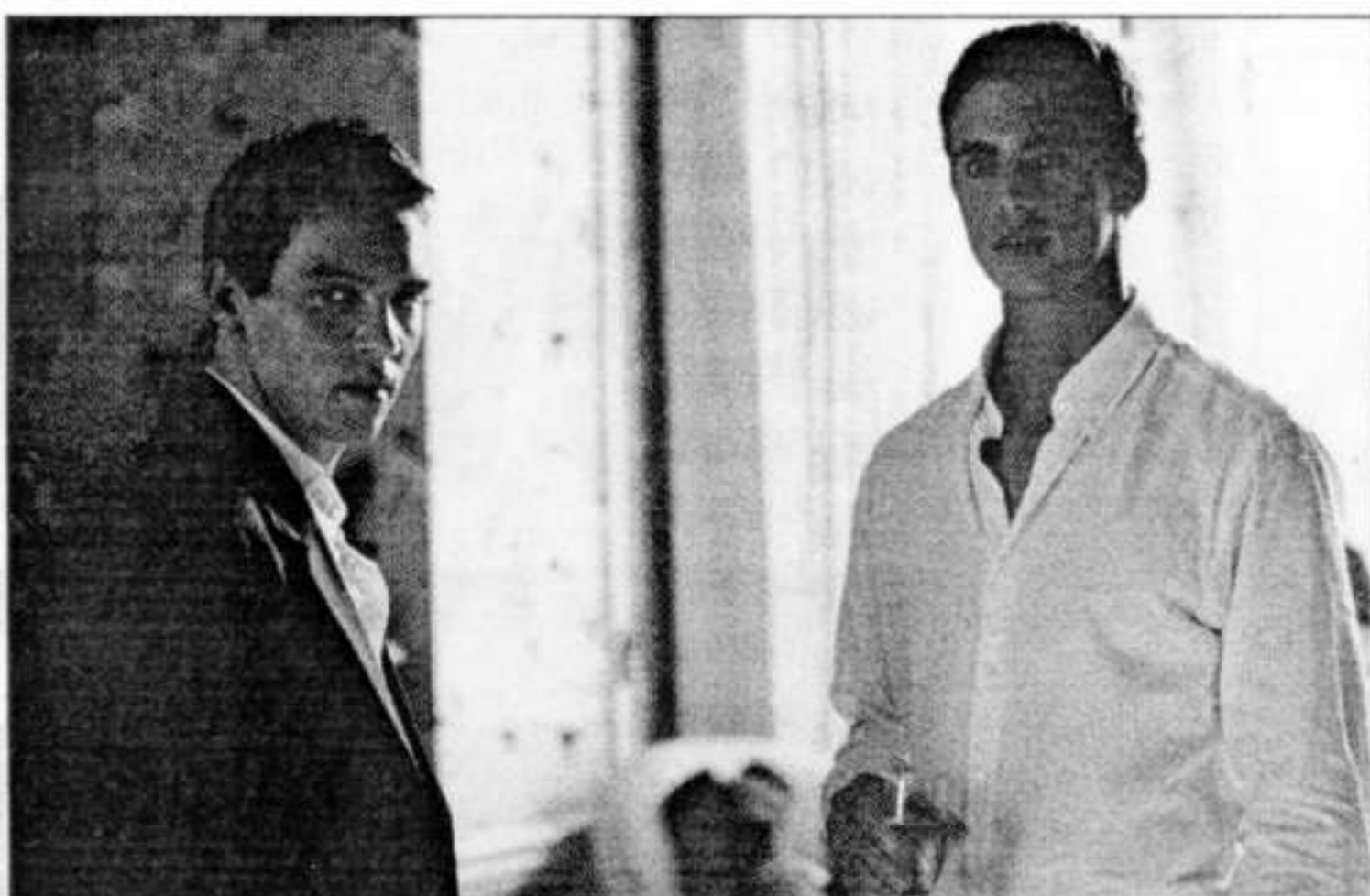
By TODD McCARTHY

**A** change of scenery does Woody Allen a world of good in "Match Point." Making his first film in the U.K. with a story originally conceived for New York, Allen once again takes up issues of morality and guilt in what amounts to "An English Tragedy," as in Theodore Dreiser. Well-observed and superbly cast picture is the filmmaker's best in quite a long time and as such reps an attractive potential acquisition for a U.S. distrib keen to break Allen's recent string of B.O. flops.

Although the script is spiked with mordant humor, the prevailing serious mood is underlined by doom-laden laments from Italian grand opera and refs to Dostoyevsky, Strindberg and even Andrew Lloyd Webber's dramatically similar "The Woman in White." In thematic terms, "Match Point," whose tennis allusion reflects a preoccupation with the role of luck in life, comes closest to "Crimes and Misdemeanors" among Allen's films.

First 45 minutes constitute marvelous social and romantic comedy-drama. With the action set squarely among Britain's young upper crust, tale has the debonair Tom Hewett (Matthew Goode) taking on Chris Wilton (Jonathan Rhys Meyers, the Elvis of the moment) as a tennis coach at his exclusive club. Chris is fresh off the pro tennis circuit, where he did well but never broke through to the winner's circle. Although identified as Irish, the terribly attractive athlete speaks with an impeccable posh accent that allows him to fit in seamlessly with Tom and his set.

Since Chris' background is never further explored, memories of notable works about calculated upward mobility from "Washington Square" to "Room at the Top" stir up initial questions as to how much of a schemer Chris may be. But in every respect he seems sincere, evincing an honest interest in serious literature and opera, tastes



Jonathan Rhys Meyers, left, and Matthew Goode star in Woody Allen's Brit-set film "Match Point," out of competition at Cannes.

which ideally suit Tom's attractive sister Chloe (Emily Mortimer), who a bit overeagerly takes Chris under her wing and into her bed.

With Chris' road to success now all but paved with clover, there's got to be a snake in the underbrush, and it comes in the dazzlingly sexy form of young American Nola Rice (Scarlett Johansson), who's Tom's girlfriend but who strikes immediate sparks with Chris.

An obvious tinderbox of trouble, Nola is a moody neurotic with a past who drowns her frustration over a stalled acting career with constant drink. Fully aware of its ill-advisability, nothing can prevent these two pillow-lipped sex objects from getting down to it, which they do during a downpour in a literal roll in the wheat during a weekend in the country.

Suddenly, however, Nola is history, gone from Tom's and Chris' lives and apparently from

London as well. Chris and Chloe marry, much to the delight of Hewett family patriarch Alec (Brian Cox), who continues to favor Chris with opportunities in the family business world, and Tom quickly follows suit with a new woman. But after Chris spots Nola by chance at the New Tate, the juices start flowing all over again, this time in a torrent, which steers the story straight on a collision course toward tragedy.

On a scene-by-scene basis, pic's midsection slows a bit, as Chloe obsesses over her inability to get pregnant while her husband, busy shagging Nola nonstop, becomes tortured by his increasingly untenable position between the two women. Heavy pressure from Nola eventually forces his hand, resulting in a morally ghastly climax redeemed by a genuinely inspired dramatic twist that beautifully and bitterly dovetails with the philosophical notion posited at the outset.

One immediate advantage of the film's English setting is that it effectively prevents the young male lead from doing a Woody Allen imitation, as has so often happened in the past. Beyond that, there is an evident refreshment and restimulation that's resulted from Allen's immersion in a new milieu, a rarefied one not often depicted by English filmmakers these days. An assortment of mostly upscale locations provides a sumptuous backdrop that takes on added mood from the consistently gray skies; exemplary lensing by Remi Adefarasin; and the overlay of excerpts from Verdi, Rossini, Donizetti, et al.

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Cast is terrific. Rhys Meyers, who has been flitting about the margins of real recognition for the past few seasons, comes further into his own with an excellent performance in the central role, one which requires him to be both genuinely ingratiating and entirely repugnant.

More of a blond bombshell than ever, Johansson combines strong elements of sexuality, self-doubt and emotional insistence in an indelible portrait of tragic beauty.

Mortimer aptly pinpoints Chloe's overavailability as the initial source of her husband's growing disinterest, while Goode nicely rounds out the young quartet as a smooth chap whose great looks, wit and intelligence seem virtual birthrights. It's amusing to see Cox, so often associated with threatening or dicey characters, so smoothly essaying a generous man of means.

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