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A Warm December (BRITISH—COLOR)

Uneven sudser about terminal illness vs. romance. Sidney Poitier stars and directs. Thin outlook.

Variety

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Hollywood, April 7.

National General Pictures release of First Artists Prods. presentation. Produced by Melville Tucker. Directed by Sidney Poitier. Screenplay, Lawrence Roman; camera (Technicolor), Paul Beeson; editors, Pembroke Herring, Peter Pitt; music, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson; art direction, Elliot Scott; set decoration, Norman Reynolds; sound, Claude Hitchcock, Gordon K. McCallum; asst. director, David Tomblin. Reviewed at Granada Theatre, L.A., April 6, '73. (MPAA Rating: PG.) Running Time: 99 MINS.

Dr. Younger Sidney Poitier
Catherine Esther Anderson
Younger's Daughter Yvette Curtis
Barlow George Baker
Ambassador Oswandu ... Earl Cameron
Ambassador's Aide Johnny Sekka
Barlow's Wife Hilary Crane
Mystery Man John Beardmore
Russian Diplomat Milos Kirek
Barlow Children

Ann and Stephanie Smith
Club Singer Letta Mbulu

Disease-themed films have, with very few exceptions, performed poorly with audiences, and "A Warm December" is not likely to reverse the pattern. Sidney Poitier's initial production for First Artists Prods. was poorly written by Lawrence Roman, sluggishly directed by Poitier himself (who heads the cast as well), and awkwardly paced. The National General Pictures release runs most of its length as an apparent suspenser, then shifts to its terminal disease theme, effect of which is not so much suspense as a feeling of tease and cheat. Commercial prospects are iffy.

For slightly more than half the film's 99-minute length, Poitier, an American doctor in Britain with his motherless child Yvette Curtis, is engaged in cat-and-mouse pursuit of Esther Anderson, niece of an African nation's ambassador, Earl Cameron. She is shadowed unendingly by mysterious people, from whom she is usually fleeing with Poitier's help. To go on so

long with this artifice is eventually self-destructive to the film, and the eventual revelation that Miss Anderson is being watched constantly because she is fatally ill with sickle-cell anemia (the real-life plague of blacks) is unfortunately not well received. Audiences will likely feel more exploited than satisfied.

(With "Dark Victory" the biggest exception to the disease-theme pix rule, it is worth recalling that the promotion for that film kept referring to "the thing" that was driving Bette Davis and George Brent apart. Not a hint that illness was the heavy. From promotional footage on "Warm December" seen to date, it appears the same deception is being practiced. It may backfire.)

Intercut with the meller sequences pertinent to the plot are travelog-type scenes with the principals, which come across as padding though that was not the apparent intent. The film comes to a complete halt in these extraneous minutes. Poitier's direction has moments of seeming forced and too-aware of the plots faults.

Miss Anderson has a pleasant screen presence and comes across best of the entire cast. Production credits are okay, however the score by Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson is a travesty on the symphonic-sudser music genre. *Murf.*