

## Document Citation

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## AFTERIMAGE

An Intermedia Films presentation in association with Catch 23 Entertainment of a Whitetail Images production. Produced by John Cocca and Christopher Nakis. Executive producers, Robert Sturm, Arnold Rifkin. Co-producer, Konstantine Votsis.

Directed by Robert Manganelli. Screenplay, Tony Schillaci, Manganelli. Camera (color), Kurt Brabbee; editor, Cameron Spencer; production designer, Kathy Sweeney; original music, Richard Tuttobene; music supervisor, James Vandemark; sound design (Dolby Digital), Will Riley; sound editor, James Lay; associate producers, Schillaci, Van Hayden, Katie Papas; second unit director, Tim Brown; casting, Rachel Abroms. Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival (American Spectrum), Jan. 23, 2001. Running time: 92 MIN.

Joe ..... John Mellencamp  
Lora ..... Terrylene  
Aunt ..... Louise Fletcher  
Sammy ..... Billy Burke  
Rye ..... Michael Zelniker  
Det. Conway ..... Michael Twaine

By DENNIS HARVEY

**P**hotographer and experimental filmmaker Robert Manganelli's first feature apparently was conceived at a Sundance Lab a decade ago. Unfortunately, time marched on while production plans didn't, and its long-delayed arrival leaves "AfterImage" looking very much the umpteenth unnecessary serial-killer potboiler posing as psychological drama. Pic does boast decent atmospherics, especially on the visual plane. But like higher-budget efforts such as "The Cell" and "In Dreams," its stylized presentation

ultimately seems so much pretentious camouflage for exploitative pulp. Given modest scale, low star wattage and the similarly themed overkill about to be unleashed by "Hannibal," this watchable but non-thrilling thriller looks headed straight to ancillary.

Vet rocker John Mellencamp (in his first acting role since 1990's "Falling From Grace," which he co-wrote) plays Rochester, N.Y., police photographer Joe, first seen arriving at the scene of a teenage girl's brutal murder.

Expectations of narrative gamesmanship or credence are lowered right away as the baseball-capped killer is completely ignored by cops despite his suspicious presence inside the cordoned-off crime zone. For no clear reason beyond plot convenience, said 30-ish weirdo Rye (Michael Zelniker) decides Joe is some sort of spiritual twin. After all, both pore over evidence of heinous misdeeds.

Rye's initial motivation for murder is never explained, his mental make-up left blank beyond the usual miscellany of twitchy mannerisms, Peeping Tom episodes and profound/mad mutterings ("Darkness exists only in the absence of light.").

Later slayings, however, are designed to be discovered by Joe, who is on a leave of absence to shake his job's depressive burden. He spends time with his ailing aunt (Louise Fletcher) and mentally disabled twin brother Sammy (Billy Burke). Their domestic helpmate is Lora (Terrylene), a deaf-mute woman Joe coaxes toward romantic involvement.

Tired conceit has Lora experiencing "visions" that soon become premonitions of the killer's next move. Those moves soon close in on Joe and his loved ones.

Dialogue is relatively minimal, which helps pic's combination of gaping logic gaps and glum seriousness avoid outright absurdity. But, that tactic leaves Manganelli and Tony Schillaci's screenplay unable to fully develop the characters, who seem to carry the weight of the sinful world (Catholic guilt and faith are recurrent motifs) on their shoulders for reasons that are sketchy at best.

Fletcher in particular is wasted in a role that might just as well be called Sad Old Lady. Terrylene (the director's wife) and Burke are adequate in roles that stereotypically equate disability with childlike innocence and wisdom.

Zelnicker skulks and leers as a baddie with no discernible backstory or mission. Mellencamp, his pinup days as a junior Springsteen long gone, now shares William H. Macy's hangdog air of disillusioned middle age. His thoughtful, low-key turn works well here, even if it lacks the charisma needed to carry a feature (at least one this dependent on pregnant silences). Indeed, all principal thespians wisely stick to understatement, but their gravitas can't turn material's smoke and mirrors into genuine, haunted complexity.

Manganelli is on firmest ground when summoning portentous moods from near-abstract textural elements. With the sympathetic aid of lenser Kurt Brabbee and editor Cameron Mitchell, pic separates itself from straight-up exploiters in montages of dream, nature and symbolic imagery that have a distinct poetic cadence, if scant resonance.

Less admirable is the frequent camera fixation (as in so many serial-killer pix) on pictures of nude, mutilated young female bodies, though the killings themselves are more teased than shown.

Richard Tuttobene's somber orchestral score is a significant plus. Tech aspects are pro.