

# Woody scores twice

## 'Stardust Memories' satirizes fans' obsessions

By TOM MOORE

WILL Woody Allen fans like *Stardust Memories*? It's his most cynical film. It lacks the romanticism that made *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan* so popular. It doesn't have as much of the zany wit that made Allen a cult hero. And it doesn't have any characters with which the audience can readily identify, which made *Interiors* bearable.

*Stardust Memories*, written and directed by Allen, is the story of Sandy Bates (Woody Allen), a celebrated comic filmmaker, who against his will spends a weekend in New Jersey with a bunch of film enthusiasts. *Stardust* has a free-association narrative, sort of like that of *Annie Hall*, but more chaotic.

While at the hotel, Allen has memories of his love affair with a beautiful but highly neurotic actress (Charlotte Rampling). He calls up his French mistress (Marie Christine Barrault) who soon arrives on the scene and becomes somewhat distressed because Bates has become infatuated with a concert violinist (Jessica Harper).

Interspersed with these romantic goings-on are memories of Bates' childhood and various fantasies. Reality and fantasy are juxtaposed in *Stardust Memories*, and it becomes rather hard to distinguish between the two.

Bates' life is complicated even more by the constant assault of fans. It seems like every two seconds someone is rushing up to Bates to tell how wonderful he is, asking him to make some benefit appearance

before a group, and begging him for his autograph. One fellow says, "Could you just write 'To Phyllis Weinstein, you unfaithful lying bitch.'"

Just about every person who says something to Bates tells him they "really love his films. Especially the

out—and Woody Allen has become a neurotic Everyman. People look up at the screen and see themselves.

The fans that bug Allen torture him unknowingly with their crazy demands. He shows us this in *Stardust Memories* through brilliant, brutal caricatures.

Some critics have suggested that is an attempt on Allen's part to scatter some of his audience, to become a little less popular. However, considering Allen's artistic integrity, this seems an invalid and too serious analysis. One of the major points of *Stardust Memories* is that critics and the public take films and celebrities too seriously. Asked what he was trying to say in one of his films, Sandy Bates replies: "I was just trying to be funny." Trying to dissect things further, Allen says, usually results in a bunch of horsefeathers.

*Stardust Memories* obviously borrows much from Federico Fellini's *8½* and Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*. The film hasn't been criticized as much for this as have Brian De Palma's *Dressed To Kill* and Paul Mazursky's *Willie And Phil*—other movies that take much from classic films. Perhaps this is because Allen answers such criticism with a joke. Asked if a scene in one of Sandy Bates' films was an homage to Vicent Price's *House Of Wax*, Tony Roberts answers, "No, we just stole the idea."

But Allen does more than just steal the idea from Fellini. There are many parallels in the two stories. In both, a filmmaker is plagued by his public. Both have three women central to the director's life. What seems particularly glaring is that Allen borrows much from Fellini's style. He

uses the same sort of grotesque faces in *Stardust Memories* that've populated Fellini films for years. Allen uses subjective camera in *Stardust Memories* the same way Fellini does in *8½*. Fans manically rush up to the camera spouting idiotic things.

Such scenes are designed brilliantly by cinematographer Gordon Willis, who shot the last three Allen films as well as the two *Godfathers*. Allen recently has become known as a fine director of actors; he used to be limited to directing himself. *Stardust Memories*, like *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*, is filled with fine performances from Woody Allen, Jessica Harper, Marie Christine Barrault and Charlotte Rampling in the leads, and from Lorraine Newman, Louise Lasser and many others in smaller parts. But the roles are more fragmented in *Stardust Memories*, so they don't linger as long as in earlier Allen films.

What is more memorable than the acting or the jokes is the look of the film. *Stardust Memories* is an essay in film style. Individual shots stand out: Charlotte Rampling on the floor reading; balloons floating through the sky; faces of the damned on a train ride.

*Stardust Memories* is a haunting film representing a new kind of turn in the continually amazing career of Woody Allen.

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## Movies

early funny ones." Bates, like Allen, has decided to turn his hand towards more serious things.

The scenes in *Stardust Memories* dealing with Bates' fans have been interpreted as snide nose-thumbing at Allen's fans. Andrew Sarris says in his review, "*Stardust Memories* is the most mean-spirited and misanthropic film I have seen in years and years from anyone anywhere." But it's not "mean spirited," as Sarris, other critics and some viewers suggest.

People attach a absurd significance to celebrities. Who hasn't gotten into some discussion about what famous folks they've actually seen?

Allen has become a special sort of hero to a generation of Americans. At first—in films like *Bananas* and *Sleeper*—it was because he was a downtrodden schmuck who scored back at the world with his vicious barbs. But as Allen has evolved as a storyteller and filmmaker, he's come to mean much more to his audiences. His films deal with the problems of living—of trying to work things

## Allen's black-bound book 'Side Effects' looks at wide range of life's absurdities

By MARK MURRELL

Woody Allen

*Side Effects*

WOODY Allen's new book is bound in his favorite color—black. Allen's latest collection of stories, *Side Effects*, deals with funerals, murders, broken diets, insanity, assassination, terminal illness and unrequited love. Needless to say, each of Allen's sketches is hilarious.

The absurdity of life, Allen's favorite theme, certainly is the main point of *Side Effects*. This has been Allen's favorite subject since he wrote *Without Feathers*, but *Side Effects* finds his treatment of the subject more mature and well-developed.

Though the one-liners are guaranteed to make you laugh out loud ("Cloquet hated reality but realized it was still the only place to get a good steak"), these sketches hang together better than many of Allen's previous ones. Some of these works are actually cohesive enough to evoke morals such as: "Insanity is relative, why do I exist?" or "Why am I reading this existential comedy while eating canned toxic wastes for dinner?"

But the dark themes of this book only enhance Allen's comic genius. He can comfort the reader by insinuating that the insane inclinations we all often have are OK.

How many times have you felt like this?

"He wanted to run and hide, or, even better, to become something solid and durable—a heavy chair, for instance. A chair has no problems, he thought. It's

there; nobody bothers it. It doesn't have to pay rent or get involved politically...and you never have to worry that if you take it to a party it will suddenly start coughing or make a scene. People just sit in a chair, and when those people die other people sit in it."

Jean-Paul Sartre couldn't have said it better.

As in all of his books, Allen's neuroses are what we find entertaining because we all share the same fears and anxieties to a degree.

## Books

Woody Allen has never been afraid to tell the truth, and in "My Speech to the Graduates," he doesn't spare us future citizens of the real world any anxiety.

"More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads," Allen says. "One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have wisdom to choose correctly."

It is impossible to say that all of Allen's one-liners are brilliant. Some fall flat, but others are worth waiting 20 pages to enjoy.

"The Condemned," "By Destiny Denied," "The Shallowest Man" and "Retribution" may sound like titles from hard-hitting films, but they are actually titles of some of the best pieces Allen has ever produced.



|Woody Allen

Though most were published previously in *The New Yorker* and the *Kenyon Review*, *Side Effects* is a great book to have around on a cold, gray day when everyone is wearing thick black sweaters.

Woody Allen is still proving that he is a brilliantly funny man.

He says his only regret in life is that he is not someone else. I wish he were running for president.

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