

Deadly tale of partying and murder out on DVD

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thrill was Angel Melendez (Wilson Cruz), the drug-dealing neophyte who looked up to Michael as though he were a god. But



Wilson Cruz plays the doomed Angel Melendez in 'Party Monster.'

as the demands of leading the party parade escalated, Michael's behavior became increasingly outrageous. One day he went too far. He murdered Angel and James was forced to realize that no excuse — even Angel's increasingly threatening demands that Michael pay for his drug use — could justify such a brutal act.

The story is not new to filmmakers Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato — it's based on their documentary of the same name, which premiered at the Sundance

Festival, then went on to win an Emmy Award. The documentary was also shown on Cinemax and Channel 4 UK; it took first place in non-fiction at the 1999 USA Film Festival and won the Grand Jury Award at the Outfest in Los Angeles.

Bailey and Barbato began discussing doing a feature version with Killer Films as they finished the documentary. Says Bailey, "We had been huge fans of Christine Vachon's work from "Swoon" to "I Shot Andy Warhol" and as the patron saint of impossible movies we thought if anyone could get this made, she could."

Bailey and Barbato were interested in revisiting the Alig story as a feature film because of its dramatic possibilities. "With a documentary you are restricted to what people actually say and do; with a movie you can take liberties that result in characters who are essentially more true to life than the 'real' individuals in the documentary," says Bailey. "Part of the documentary experience is keeping the audience separate from the subjects. We wanted the audience to be part of Michael and James' experience. We wanted to immerse them in their world."

Bailey and Barbato had persuaded James St. James to write a book based on his experiences with Michael and decided to base the feature on the book that resulted ("Disco Blood Bath"). The James/Michael relationship frames the script. Says Barbato, "It's a buddy movie

about co-dependency and their struggle for control of one another is at the core of the narrative."

Instead of demonizing Michael as a freakish killer, "Party Monster" creates a very real connection between him and the audience.

"When we look into his heart, we are looking into our own," continues Bailey. "Who has not at some point in their lives wished that they could stay young forever or wished that they did not have to get out of bed in the morning and go to work?"

In the end, "Party Monster" wants to

seduce its audience, so that when tragedy strikes they feel both implicated and discomforted.

"We want the audience to feel his sense of loss rather than lofty righteousness when he brings down the curtain on the Michael Alig show," says co-director Barbato. "There are no winners or losers here—except of course, Angel. But what is most disturbing is the lack of moral clarity; Michael dared to live out our fantasies — but look at what happened. His story is a sad film all dressed up and ready to party."

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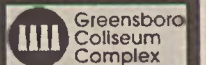
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