

'Mona Lisa' portrait of call girl and her driver

Nat King Cole's famous song "Mona Lisa" asks the poignant questions, "Are you warm? Are you real. Mona Lisa? Or just a lonely lovely work of art?" Neil Jordan's new film of the same name is definitely warm and real. This "lovely work of art" opens tomorrow at the Varsity Theatre and is every bit as haunting and powerful as DaVinci's portrait of the mysterious lady.

The movie's subject is the relationship between Simone, a high-priced call girl, and George, her driver. Simone is played by an exotic 20-year-old actress named Cathy Tyson. In her film debut, Tyson comes across as immensely sophisticated, a fully mature actress. She holds her own against Bob Hoskins, whose brilliant portrayal of George is the essential spark that sets the film ablaze.

Through Hoskins' character, who is hired to drive Simone to her various appointments in the ritzy areas of the city, the viewer is led through the London underworld of

Elizabeth Ellen Cinema

pornography. He is, by his own admission, cheap and instantly clashes with his charge, whose philosophy can be summed up in her quip "Being cheap is one thing. Looking cheap is something else."

How right she is. Jordan has allowed the character to succinctly state one of the movie's basic themes, which is that realities do not always match appearances. The theme is most vividly evident in George — his exterior is in direct contrast to the interior. He is an ex-con, a petty criminal out to earn a semi-honest living. No knight in shining armor, George is nevertheless a proverbial unpolished gem: his low-class exterior disguises an extraordinarily good heart.

Hoskins takes this role, which was



Cathy Tyson and Bob Hoskins in 'Mona Lisa'

especially created for him, and runs with it. He takes the concept of the anti-hero to new heights, perhaps surpassing even Arthur Miller's

Willie Loman, that classic anti-hero, because George is not only sympathetic but also extremely endearing. He not only falls in love with Simone but also has a soft spot for white rabbits and 15-year-old girls gone astray.

Simone is, in contrast, externally elegant with the poise and manners of a lady. She feels right at home in London's posh hotels and estates, yet her purpose is as low as the streetwalkers'. She still makes her living horizontally. It is eventually revealed that she is inwardly cheap, lacking George's inner goodness.

These contrasts are played to the hilt through use of strong visual images. In adjacent scenes, the viewer sees tacky tarts hustling johns on a dirty back street and the ever-poised Simone maneuvering through a

lobby in evening attire. Another especially vivid image is the cage-like elevator of Simone's apartment building which graphically shows the heroine's trapped existence.

A secondary theme of "Mona Lisa" might be men's attitudes toward women. A black and white polarization becomes apparent with the introduction of two villains, Mortwell (Michael Caine) and Anderson (Clarke Peters), as foils for George. Mortwell is George and Simone's boss, the crooked leader of a porn and prostitution ring, and Anderson is one of his sadistic pimps. These two treat women as easy targets for violence and abuse, as disposable trash.

Early in the film, George explains to his friend Thomas (Robbie Coltraine) that "Angels are men." Whether or not this is true, he certainly tries to live up to the role by becoming a guardian angel to Simone and several other prostitutes. His attitude toward these women is protective and quasi-paternal, yet never judgmental or patronizing. His concern is genuine and pure.

In "Mona Lisa," as in most movies, quality comes from the skillful combination of all production aspects. This is without a doubt a classy film. Its overall effect is moving and beautiful, yet tinged with the melancholy produced by encountering gritty reality.

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