

The Pick-up Artist / Rapture

James Toback's *The Pick-up Artist* is an odd beast, but a likeable one and one that, today, seems a lot better than it seemed back in 1987 when it was released to a tepid reaction from critics and audiences. Toback wrote his script, got the film set up with Warren Beatty as kind of a ghost producer (someone else eventually credited), and the thought was that Robert De Niro would be an absolutely perfect fit for the film's central character, the pick-up artist of the title.

A reading was held at De Niro's home and, according to Toback, went very well. Martin Scorsese had attended and laughed up a storm. But the following morning Toback awoke with an uneasy feeling. At that moment, he received a call from Beatty, who told him the reason he had the uneasy feeling was because he'd probably come to the realization that De Niro and/or any actor his age was just too old for the role. Toback admitted that's exactly what he was feeling. Beatty tasked Toback to call De Niro and deliver the news, but before that could happen, De Niro called Toback and said that while he'd do the film if Toback really wanted him to, after thinking about it he felt he was too old to play that kind of character. Three people all on the same page at the same time.

And so, casting began for a younger actor. Enter Robert Downey, Jr. (in the film billed as Robert Downey). Upon meeting him, Toback thought he was perfect to play the titular hero of the film, Jack Jericho and cast him practically on the spot. Molly Ringwald had been cast as the female lead, Randy Jensen, and the supporting players were an impressive lot – Dennis Hopper as Ringwald's alcoholic gambler father, Flash Jensen Harvey Keitel as mobster Angelo Scolara, who's trying to collect the large debt that Flash owes, Danny Aiello as a friend of Downey's, and the great Mildred Dunnock (in her final screen role) as Downey's grandmother.

The film also featured in small roles a number of people who would go on to have successful careers, including Vanessa Williams, Christine Baranski, Lorraine Bracco, Victoria Jackson, Bob Gunton, and Tony Sirico, who'd go on to play Paulie on *The Sopranos*. The wonderful actor Reni Santoni even makes a small appearance.

It's hard to know what's what on *The Pick-up Artist* – whether it changed drastically in the editing or even during shooting. Danny Aiello's character has little to do and literally disappears from the movie, and others suffer that fate as well, so one wonders if there was a longer and different movie at one point (the film proper, sans end credits, runs only seventy-eight minutes)? Clearly the producers wanted a PG-13 rating, because several uses of the "F" word can clearly be seen coming out of people's mouths while a different less offensive word is

actually heard. In the end, all we're left with is the film as released. And all these years later, guess what? It has a lot of charm – in the writing and directing and most especially the performances.

Molly Ringwald is just wonderful and Downey is so charming he almost makes the early machinations of his character likeable. The film was kind of sold as a happy-go-lucky romantic comedy, but this is James Toback we're talking about here. Yes, there are funny things, but there are also things that are darker and a bit unsettling in a comedy, and that was probably more confusing to audiences in 1987 than it is to audiences today. The film also looks great, thanks to the amazing cameraman, Gordon Willis. It would be great to also say that the film's musical score made a major contribution to the film, but one simply can't.

It's not that composer Georges Delerue didn't write a wonderful, romantic, and melodic score – he did, as you'll hear on this CD. In fact, it's one of his best. But at some point Toback made the decision to remove most of it. The first note of score isn't heard until forty-eight minutes into the film. One can listen to what Delerue wrote for the early part of the movie and make the case that it would have probably helped the film land better with audiences, but that's hindsight. Toback seems to have an uneasy relationship with film music. He'd worked with Delerue prior to *The Pick-up Artist* on his 1983 film *Exposed*. The fact is, most of Toback's fiction films carry no music credit at all, and the only two that have what you'd call conventional film music scores are the two that Delerue composed. In the released version of *The Pick-up Artist*, there's probably not more than five minutes of the approximately twenty-five minutes that Delerue wrote and even what's there reuses the same cue at least twice.

But on its own the Delerue score is utterly captivating and lovely – just a perfect listening experience. By the time of *The Pick-up Artist*, Delerue was already a legend, and had won the Oscar for his score to *A Little Romance*. He'd begun scoring films in 1950, but really came into prominence in the French cinema in the late 1950s. He was a fresh and unique musical voice and unlike any other composer working back then. He scored many classic French films in those days, including Truffaut's *Jules and Jim*, *Shoot the Piano Player*, and *The Soft Skin*, Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, Godard's *Contempt*, De Broca's *That Man from Rio*. He also composed scores for countless other 1960s films from all over the world, including *A Man for All Seasons*, *Interlude*, *Viva Maria*, *Our Mother's House*, *Women in Love*, *Anne of the Thousand Days*, and many others. One of his most memorable scores from those years was for a little seen 1965 film called *Rapture*.

Rapture was based on Phyllis Hastings' 1954 novel, *Rapture in My Rags* and had a screenplay by Canadian writer, Stanley Mann (who'd also done the script for William Wyler's *The Collector* the same year as *Rapture* – Mann was nominated for an Oscar for *The Collector*). The director was John Guillermin, who'd been steadily building a successful career with such films as *I Was Monty's Double*, *The Day They Robbed the Bank of England*, *Waltz of the Toreadors* and *Guns at Batasi* (he wouldn't achieve his greatest success until almost a decade after *Rapture* – with *The Towering Inferno*). Guillermin assembled a terrific cast – Melvyn Douglas, Dean Stockwell, Gunnel Lindblom, and, in the film's pivotal role of the troubled teen, Agnes, Patricia Gozzi. Three years earlier, Gozzi had given one of the most amazing performances ever given by a child actor, in the great French film, *Sundays and Cybele*. As in that film, she is the heart and soul of *Rapture* and every bit as good as she was in the earlier film. Set on the Brittany seacoast, the story revolves around lonely Agnes and the arrival of a fugitive, and the impact that has on everyone, including her stern father.

The film garnered some excellent reviews. *The New York Daily News* said, "Moviemaking at its best" and *Time Magazine* said, "The blazing Miss Gozzi graduates to a woman's love through joy, homicidal rage, and searing pain, hardly making a move that does not register on the heart." Despite the reviews, the film played only briefly and then disappeared, with only occasional showings on television. But it developed a rabid base of fans, who loved the beauty of its black-and-white scope photography (by Marcel Grignon), its coming-of-age story, the performances, and especially the haunting and beautiful score by Georges Delerue.

For *Rapture*, Delerue captured every emotion and nuance of the story, his music almost acting as another character in the film. The beautiful writing for strings and reeds is uniquely Delerue-esque, and his use of the wordless soprano is stunning. It's a stunning achievement and one of the high water marks of his career.

Both *The Pick-up Artist* and *Rapture* were originally released on Intrada, but as separate releases – both are out-of-print (*The Pick-up Artist* has been OOP for almost a decade). Since the two Delerue scores are a perfect pair, we're very excited to make them available again. *The Pick-up Artist* is in beautiful stereo from the masters housed in the Fox vaults. The tape for *Rapture* was provided by Colette Delerue and is in mono. We've done a new mastering for both scores.

— Bruce Kimmel