

The Main Feature

Season 32 - Issue 5 (screening 10.11.11)



USA

UK release 1 July 2009

Certificate 15

140 minutes

Director: Michael Mann

Screenplay: Ronan Bennett, Michael Mann and Ann Biderman

Cinematographer: Dante Spinotti

Music: Elliot Goldenthal

Cast

Johnny Depp

John Dillinger

Christian Bale

Melvin Purvis

Marion Cotillard

Billie Frechette

Billy Crudup

J. Edgar Hoover

Stephen Dorff

Horner Van Meter

Based on Bryan Burrough's 2004 non fiction book *Public Enemies: America's Greatest Crime Wave and the Birth of the FBI, 1933-3*, the movie is well-researched. It even tries to discover Dillinger's speaking style. Mann shot on location in the Crown Point jail, scene of the famous jailbreak with the fake gun. He shot in the Little Bohemia Lodge in the same room Dillinger used, and Depp is costumed in clothes to match those the bank robber left behind. Mann redressed Lincoln Avenue on either side of the Biograph Theater, and laid streetcar tracks.

Ever since he was a boy the 46-year-old Depp has been fascinated by the John Dillinger legend, partly because he was born in Owensborough, Kentucky, 160 miles from the Indiana farm where Dillinger lived as a teenager and, more significantly, because Depp's own grandfather and stepfather had operated on the wrong side of the law.

What was the draw of playing an outlaw like John Dillinger? He's a bona fide American folk hero.

JOHNNY DEPP: When I was about nine or 10, I had a fascination with John Dillinger. I don't know why, probably not a healthy one. There was something mischievous about him, something intriguing. In terms of taking on the role, it's the idea that the guy was called public enemy number one, but he was never an enemy of the public, ever. That I found intriguing and challenging.

As this picture shows, Depp (the one on the right) looks a lot like Dillinger:



"It has to do with my family and my upbringing," he explained. "My grandfather, who I was very close to as a kid, had run moonshine into dry counties like Robert Mitchum in that movie *Thunder Road*, and my stepfather also had been a bit of a rogue and done burglaries and robberies and had spent some time in Statesville Prison in Illinois where we ended up shooting some of the film. There was some kind of inherent connection I had." While doing research for the role he discovered a mug shot of his stepfather, Robert Palmer, who died in 2000, in the files at the Statesville maximum security prison.

"My stepdad was an inspiration to me," he said. "I knew about his past and I remember when I was growing up him referring to it as his college years. When I got older and asked him what college he had attended, he said it was Statesville Prison. So for me to be able to get that much closer to

him now, especially since he's passed on, was huge for me. He did what he did and I'm proud of him for doing what he had to do to survive. And he and my grandfather were great inspirations for me for Dillinger."



What is it about this sort of character that fascinates the public?

JD: If you think about where we were in 1933, which is not unlike where we are now, the banks were the enemy and they were taking the knees out from under everyone. And John Dillinger arrives on the scene and says he's going to stand up against these people. I think what's fascinating for me is he's the guy

who says: "I'm not going to take it. I don't care who you are, I'm not taking it."

Well, he definitely was a man with a sense of humor and I just happen to be a sucker for humor. So anywhere I can sneak in something that I find potentially interesting or funny I do it as much as I can get away with. But he definitely had a sense of humor, John Dillinger. This is a guy who would go to the World's Fair at the height of his sort of notoriety, public enemy number one in 1933. He goes to the World's Fair with his little Brownie automatic camera, hands it to a cop and says, 'Would you take my girlfriend's and my photograph?' That's a guy with a sense of humor. Also, he was a guy who at the same time as having that great, that wonderful outlook, like I said, knew the clock was ticking, knew his time was up, knew there wasn't much more to go. He was going to make the best of it in any case. It's pretty amazing.

John Dillinger probably saw Manhattan Melodrama as his last ever film. If you had to see a last ever film, what would it be?

JD: It would be *Withnail and I*, without question.



Marion Cotillard serves up a memorable performance in her first English-speaking lead role as Billie Frechette, indeed her portrayal makes it easy to understand why someone as hard bitten as Dillinger would be attracted to her. Billy Crudup's performance as J. Edgar Hoover is also praiseworthy.

WNCC members may recognise the actor playing "Baby Face Nelson" - Stephen Graham was one of the lead actors in "This is England", which we showed in 2008.

However Mann injects a little too much of himself into the film's style. In particular, most of the movie is shot using hand-held cameras and, while this works well to enhance the sense of chaos and confusion during certain scenes, its overuse becomes distracting and at times off-putting.

While "Public Enemies" never quite soars to the heights of "Bonnie & Clyde" or "The Untouchables," it is easily one of 2009's most satisfying action dramas for adults. Featuring memorable performances from Depp and Cotillard and a strong supporting cast, "Public Enemies" is an intelligent and compelling story about a man whose true story is as intriguing as the myth that has enveloped his life long after his death.

Iain McGlashan

PS

On 8 March 2012 we will be screening the 1938 James Cagney classic "Angels with Dirty Faces" and it will be interesting to see that after tonight's film.

Reactions toMachan – 27 October 2011

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Votes	~	~	~	~	~	2	10	12	8	~	~
Total received	– 32					Average Score – 6.81					

Your Comments

A “desperate” bitter-sweet film
 Serious, sad but also very funny. A good evening’s entertainment.
 Really funny enjoyable film
 I loved this film – very amusing – a feel good film!
 Interesting, but the film seemed to lose its way
 Another good choice for One World Week – at least only some of the handball team set out for England!
 How can such desperation give rise to humour? But it did!
 It made me proud to be living in a handball free country
 Amusing but ultimately very sad and thought provoking
 Without WNCC what chance would we have had of ever hearing about this film? I enjoyed it and considered it a very appropriate choice for one World Week

A Galle faced riot
 Good choice
 A good one
 Anything is possible – even handball
 Funny, sad and touching

Position	Film	Average Score
1 st	The Kings Speech	8.66
2 nd	Made in Dagenham	7.94
3 rd	Etre et Avoir	6.94
4 th	Machan	6.81

Our next film at 8pm on Thursday 24 November:

2010 Oscar winner for Best Foreign Language film

A retired court employee writes a novel hoping to find closure for one of his past unresolved homicide cases and for his unreciprocated love with his superior - both of which still haunt him decades later.



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