

VARIETY

THE INTERNATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY ■ MARCH 26 - APRIL 1, 2001

ORPHAN

A cathartic filmWorks production. (International sales cathartic filmWorks, Boston.) Produced by Richard Moos, Thomas Murtaugh, Shawna Moos, Robert T. Morgan, Gerald J. Frasco. Executive producers, Richard Moos, Shawna Moos, Murtaugh. Directed, edited by Richard Moos. Screenplay, Thomas Murtaugh.

Camera (Medallion/PFA color, Super 16-to-35mm), T.W. Li; music, Henry Beckett; music supervisor, Jay Sweet; production designer, Jan Collins; art director, Melissa Cooperman; costume designer, Scott Findley; sound, Lyle Bibler, Chris Fadale; sound designer, Bruce MacFarlane; associate producer, Jason Mullis; assistant director, Jay Frasco; casting, Samantha Eden (L.A.), Carolyn Pickman, Esra Gaffin (Boston/N.Y.). Reviewed at Santa Barbara Film Festival, March 9, 2001. Running time: 99 MIN. Jake McCrory.....Marty Maguire

Anna.....Charis Michaelson
Timmy Cummings.....Robert Wahlberg
Janie.....Karen MacDonald
Young Anna.....Alisa Beshar
Michael Murphy.....Charlie Broderick
Kelly.....Sandi Carroll
Agent Cullen.....Lonnie Farmer
Edward.....David Prete
Uncle Bill.....Brian Goodman
Aunt Frannie.....Stephanie Clayman
Lenny.....Michael J. Zammuto
Joey.....Christopher Gracia
Amanda.....Meghan Moos

By TODD MCCARTHY

An odd piece about the spiritual redemption of a hit man without the slightest suggestion of a religious context, "Orphan" possesses some moral seriousness and integrity at its core, but loses its way dramatically through too many narrative zigzags and far-fetched developments. The good intentions of this Boston-made indie won't be enough to carry it into significant theatrical release, but pic should serve as a good calling card for Northern Irish lead actor Marty Maguire, whose rugged looks and solid thesping suggest that he could soon be filling roles that Russell Crowe turns down.

The unanticipated turns in Thomas Murtaugh's original screenplay don't serve to build suspense as much as to create an ongoing question as to where "Orphan" is heading and what it might really be about. After an intriguing opening reel devoted to the solitary Jake McCrory (Maguire) listening to a perceptive phone psychic tell him all sorts of accurate things about himself, it comes as a surprise to see Jake approach a house in the guise of a door-to-door salesman and calmly gun down the inhabitant in front of the latter's pre-teen daughter.

Jake is himself soon shot in retaliation and, in a sort of between-life-and-death limbo, is instructed by his victim to look after his daughter, the girl Jake has made an orphan. Jake's first task as a new guardian angel is to insist that young Anna's bullying uncle treat her right.

A decade's jump finds Anna (Charis Michaelson) in her early 20s and Jake still shadowing her, when she visits her father's grave, for instance, or at night, much to the consternation of Jake's wife (Sandi Carroll).

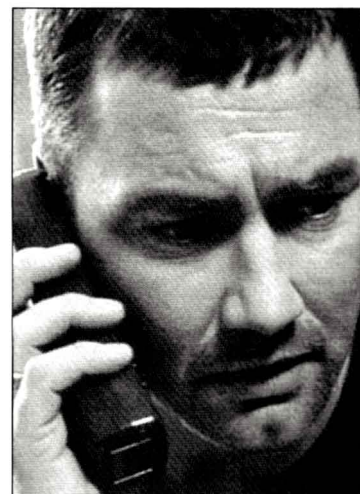
Determined to avenge her dad's murder, Anna cozies up to Timmy (Robert Wahlberg), the hit man who just missed killing Jake years back. Jake manages to insinuate himself into Anna's life, but it takes a while for him to finally admit who he is and what he did, a revelation that assumes the form of a self-sacrificial confession and gives the film its spiritual dimension.

But it's a sometimes torturous path getting to this point, one filled with plot holes that make the film less convincing by stages and motivation that is conspicuous by its absence. The crucial reasons for Jake needing to tell all to Anna are never clear, especially when he will be leaving his own daughter fatherless in the

process. Nor is it credible that, after all these years, Jake wouldn't have created a plausible excuse for his wife as to why he had to spend so many of his nights out.

Given these lapses, it's impressive that Maguire is able to build as sturdy a performance as he does. Capable of rough insolence as well as earnest sensitivity, the young actor has an athletic mien and tightly coiled manner that can erupt either into lighthearted exuberance or determined action, indicating real screen potential. Other perfs are OK.

Debuting feature helmer Richard Moos relies too much on trendy visual tropes such as jumpy camerawork, skip framing and jump cutting, while Henry Beckett's synth score is much to present and noticeable. Blow-up from Super 16 to 35mm results in a rather fuzzy look.



RISEN GUARD: Irish thesp Marty Maguire stars as a hit man in Richard Moos' debut feat "Orphan."