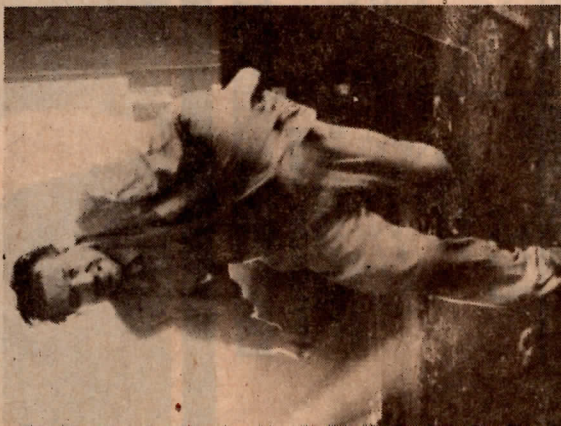


# Angel Heart a devil of a movie

By Kathy Amen

*Angel Heart*. Directed and written by Alan Parker; produced by Alan Marshall and Elliott Kastner for Warner Bros. Starring Mickey Rourke and Robert De Niro. Rated R (violence, language, nudity).

*Angel Heart* is one of those movies that makes you want to keep looking over your shoulder as you leave the theater. Throughout the movie, the



Mickey Rourke plays Harry Angel, a down-and-out private eye who's taken down a former big band singer who has disappeared. (Courtesy photo by George Kontaxis)

most everyday details are constantly infused with such menace that the sinister mood is hard to shake. This is thriller movie-making at its scariest -- and its best.

Moviegoers who can take the violence, blood and overly convoluted plot (and I admit, that cuts down the audience considerably) will find *Angel Heart* a tour-de-force of artistic cinema.

Technically, the movie is superb in every aspect. Cinematography, editing, imagery, acting and music all contribute to its success. And as for emotional impact, well, I looked over my shoulder a lot and slept with lights on after seeing *Angel Heart*. It really grabs you.

Harry Angel (Rourke) is a small-time private eye who, in 1955, takes on a missing person case for an enigmatic client named Louis Cyphre (De Niro). Some guy welshed on a deal he made with Cyphre and then disappeared.

Say Cyphre's name to yourself quickly a couple of times, and think about it. You'll get an important clue to the nature of the abrogated contract.

The story does something I thought could never be done. It

combines supernatural elements with a traditional murder mystery plot. And the mystery remains interesting, even riveting, in spite of the interference from the spirit world.

Rourke gives a terrific performance as Harry, who is a very complicated character. His faults are mostly common, human failings such as being unable to turn down apparently easy money, even when his best instincts urge him to do so. But he is hard-boiled in the extreme, and curiously insensitive. He strikes a match for his cigarette (a Camel, of course) on the sole of a dead man's shoe, for example.

His professional code of ethics is quite flexible, allowing breaking-and-entering and blackmail in addition to the less reprehensible ploys of masquerade and little white lies.

De Niro puts all of his considerable talent into making Cyphre a terrifying villain. He can bring out more shivers and shudders of fright and disgust with a glance or a twist of his cane than a whole roomful of leatherfaces can manage with their chainsaws at the ready. And the acting electricity passing

between Rourke and De Niro is something to see.

I'll add my two-cent' worth to the wealth of commentary on *Angel Heart's* rating. The movie is definitely R-rated, being visually gruesome, frank about sex, and raw in its language, but no more so than scores of other movies -- movies not as well-made or as artistically interesting, I might add -- that pick up their R's with no hubbub whatsoever.

The moviemakers supposedly excised 10 seconds of *Angel Heart* to get the rating changed from X to R. All I can say is that those 10 seconds must have been full of the steamiest pornography imaginable. When its standards are not applied uniformly, the ratings system loses its meaning.

Some viewers might object to the anti-religious surface of *Angel Heart*. But the story makes the same point as a medieval morality play or the Faust legend. If you make a pact with the devil, for short-term material gain, then you will suffer, and badly, in the long run. That message seems like a pretty traditional moral to me.