

Crimes and Misdemeanors: Well-acted and entertaining

By Kathy Amen

Crimes and Misdemeanors. Directed and written by Woody Allen; produced by Robert Greenhut for Orion. Starring Martin Landau and Woody Allen. Rated PG-13. *****

Well, Woody Allen has done it again. *Crimes and Misdemeanors* is intellectually satisfying, exceptionally well-acted and -- in spite of all that -- entertaining as well. How does he do it?

Granted, when I say "entertaining" I don't mean "escapist." Don't go to see *Crimes and Misdemeanors* to help you cheer up. In spite of a smattering of typical Allen humor, it's overall a pretty depressing movie. You might leave the theater feeling worse about the human condition than when you went in.

The story follows two parallel characters, Judah (Landau) a successful ophthalmologist, and Cliff (Allen) an unsuccessful filmmaker. One of these guys commits crimes, the other misdemeanors, in their attempts to work through some familiar problems of life.

The movie's not a cops-and-robbers thriller, though. It is suspenseful, but in a moral sense. The arena of conflict is the soul, not the streets, and the weapons are conscience, guilt and fear.

One of the most interesting things

about *Crimes and Misdemeanors* is the way Cliff and Judah, two very dissimilar characters, are connected. On the face of it, they seem to have no relationship to each other at all.

Besides the obvious differences of social status and life's work, Judah's story is told in a strictly dramatic way, while Cliff's is basically comic, with some more serious overtones.

They have a couple of common acquaintances, though. Some are played by actors familiar from other Allen movies, like Sam Waterston. For others, though, it's their first time to work with him.

Angelica Huston gives a strong performance in a relatively small role. And Alan Alda may have found a whole new career playing creeps, he does such a good job of that here.

In addition to the placement of these "friends of friends," more subtle connective devices, beloved of English majors, such as thematic similarities and sets of images, also abound. And, then, finally, at the movies end, Judah and Cliff actually meet.

If you want a lot of laughs, I recommend rental of some earlier Woody Allen movies (like *Sleeper*,



Woody Allen and Mia Farrow in a scene from *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. (Courtesy photo by Brian Hamill)

or, of course, *Annie Hall*). For a warm, glowing feeling in addition, try *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986). But for serious cinema at its best, you can't beat *Crimes and Misdemeanors*.