

Dirty (1998)

reviewed by
Dennis Schwartz

DIRTY, director Bruce Sweeney's acclaimed follow-up to his award-winning *Live Bait* (1995) – and arguably his best film to date – is the story of four seemingly unremarkable characters in East Vancouver whose lives are dominated by obsession, repression and sexual deviance. Angie (Babz Chula) is a world-wise fiftysomething who makes a living growing and selling high-grade marijuana. She caters to the masochistic sexual needs of David (Tom Scholte), an MBA student whose obsession with Angie leads him down a path of dependency and self-destruction. Nancy (Nancy Sivak), a depressed shopaholic plummeting into bankruptcy, lives in Angie's basement where she binges on junk food.

And, finally, there is Tony (Benjamin Ratner), David's roommate, a lumberyard worker whose odd social manner and chronic loneliness complicate his search for love and affection.

A powerful, witty and undeniably honest drama, *Dirty* offers both an exploration and an implicit critique of social and sexual mores. Sweeney reveals a complex emotional world where the boundaries between human need and aberrant compulsion quickly disappear. The film is the result of a vigorous, improvisation-based rehearsal process. Very much in the style of John Cassavetes and Mike Leigh, Sweeney employed a workshop-based, humanistic and character-driven style of filmmaking, using a cast that has become his stock company of actors. Sweeney uses low light, wide camera angles and an artist's fine eye to fashion a world where the characters' flaws and dysfunctions all lie starkly on the surface.

Intent on creating a highly defined sense of realism, Sweeney researched case studies of obsessive-compulsive behaviour at a medical library. He also cast Babz Chula's own mother – Abby J. Arnold, a retired social worker with no acting experience, who was flown in from Hawaii for the shoot – as Angie's onscreen mom. *Dirty* screened at the Toronto International Film Festival®, as well as the Sundance and Berlin film festivals, and earned Sweeney the award for Best New Western Canadian Director at the Vancouver International Film Festival.

Year: 1998

Language: English

Format: 35mm Colour

Runtime: 94 min

Director: Bruce Sweeney

Producer: Bruce Sweeney, John Dippong, Linda Guns

Executive Producer: Stephen Hegyes

Writer: Bruce Sweeney

Cinematographer: David Pelletier

Editor: Ross Weber

Sound: Miguel Nunes, Jeff Carter

Music: Don MacDonald

Cast: Marya Delver, Vincent Gale, Nancy Sivak, Tom Scholte, Benjamin Ratner, Abby Arnold, Babz Chula

Production Company: Dirty Productions Inc

