

## LULU ON THE BRIDGE

In the first scene, jazz saxophonist Izzy Maurer is in the restroom, watching with fascination photos of Hollywood's glamour queens, including Louise Brooks, hung on the wall. Rushed to the stage, he begins performing with his band, but suddenly an hysterical young man invades the place and starts shooting. Hit by a stray bullet, Izzy's taken to the hospital, where friends try to console him that there is life without--and after--music.

The recovery process is slow and long and Izzy sinks into severe depression based on his belief that, "I have no life without music." Hannah, his ex-wife who still cares for him, unexpectedly arrives at his door, determined to take care of him. Almost reluctantly, he accepts an invitation to dinner party at her house where he meets Hannah's new beau, Philip Kleinman, a producer, and Catherine Moore, a former actress-turned director who's now preparing a new version of Pabst's landmark film, Pandora's Box.

One evening, taking a walk in Lower Manhattan, Izzy stumbles across the body of a stranger. He grabs the man's briefcase and begins searching for clues to his identity. All he finds is a napkin with a phone number and a box containing a stone that looks ordinary, but in the dark, projects a magical blue light that has transcendental healing powers.

Without hesitation, Izzy calls the number, which belongs to Celia. In a typical Auster touch, Celia is listening to Izzy's music when he calls to suggest a meeting. After a rough beginning that arouses the anger as well as fascination of both parties, they fall for each other. Incredibly romantic midsection centers on the duo, who are so madly in love that they can't separate for a second. Celia arranges for Izzy to work as a busboy in her restaurant, where he constantly watches her; before long, he attacks a customer who comes onto her too strong and both are fired.

Oddball yarn begins to rumble as soon as Celia leaves for Ireland to shoot her movie, earlier landing the part in an audition orchestrated by Izzy. Last reel boasts a Kafkaesque ambience, when a menacing anthropologist, Dr. Van Hom, suddenly shows up in search for the precious stone. In a series of intense interrogations, Dr. Hom brings painful memories from Izzy's past: his troubled relationship with his older brother and late father.

The narrative structure is audacious, and second act has many touching moments in depicting **the transformative and redemptive power of love**. Nonetheless, pic falls apart in the last reel, and the downbeat ending, while original, is bound to frustrate viewers who'll find it peculiar and not entirely satisfying.

One can only speculate on how German helmer Wim Wenders, whom Auster originally suggested for this project, would have approached the material. But **Auster lacks the technical skills to translate his episodic story into an intriguing movie** the way that Wayne Wang did in *Smoke* and the companion docu, *Blue in the Face*, on which Auster was credited as co-filmmaker. *Lulu* contains many powerful moments, but Auster doesn't succeed in turning what's basically a riddle into a coherent and resonant film and he particularly falters with the pacing--sluggish tempo accentuates the problematic nature of the material, which ultimately may be more suitable for a novel.

**It is only at the film's end that the discerning viewer understands what has really transpired.,**

Like many of New York City waitresses, Celia Burns is an aspiring actress. Izzy Maurer, a jazz saxophonist recovering from a gunshot wound, contacts her after finding her name along with a stone having magical properties, one of which propels them into a love affair. Through her talent, and friends of Izzy's ex-wife, Celia is able to land the part of *Lulu*, one which most actresses could only dream of. Izzy is held captive and Celia chased by a mysterious man claiming to have a doctorate in anthropology who wants the magical stone. It is only at the film's end that the discerning viewer understands what has really transpired.

Writer Paul Auster made his solo directorial debut with this **romantic drama** about an affair between a middle-aged musician and an aspiring actress. Hit by a stray bullet during a nightclub shooting, jazz saxophonist Izzy Maurer (Harvey Keitel) can no longer play, and he falls into a depression. His ex-wife Hannah (Gina Gershon), now attached to producer Philip Kleinman (Mandy Patinkin), turns up unexpectedly to take care of Izzy. Izzy meets Kleinman, and he also has an encounter with actress-director Catherine Moore (Vanessa Redgrave), who's planning a production of Pandora's Box. Walking around Lower Manhattan, Izzy finds a man's body with a phone number and a stone that emits a blue light with healing properties. When he phones the number, he speaks with actress Celia (Mira Sorvino), who just happens to be listening to his music. They fall in love, and Celia gets Izzy a job as a busboy at the restaurant where she works. Both are fired when he goes into a jealous rage over the attention she receives from one of her customers. After Celia leaves to act in a film in Ireland, anthropologist Dr. Van Hom (Willem Dafoe) turns up, searching for the healing stone.

**Genre:** Drama

**Movie Type:** Romantic Drama

**Themes:** Self-Destructive Romance, Actor's Life, Musician's Life

**Director:** Paul Auster

**Main Cast:** Harvey Keitel, Mira Sorvino, Willem Dafoe, Gina Gershon, Mandy Patinkin

**Release Year:** 1998

**Country:** US

**Run Time:** 103 minutes

**These are some comments of people who watched the movie. Who do you agree with? Why? What are the strong points the reviews reveal? And the weak ones? After watching the film do you agree with the criticism raised by the film reviewers?**

**A typical quality of Auster's writing is COINCIDENCE. Spot examples of strange coincidences in the film and try to think about the why Auster "exploits" them.**

**What are the main themes that Auster tries to develop in this film?**

**Another quality of Auster's writing is the use of emblematic (dense in meaning) cues. Can you write down a few?**

**Why did the film sell well in Europe, but not in the USA?**

Paul Auster (writer of Wayne Wang's *Smoke and Blue in the Face*) is no stranger to oddball productions. *Lulu on the Bridge* is another step down the path to David Lynch, with Harvey Keitel as a sax player who gets shot and -- after a miracle recovery that leaves him with one lung -- embarks on an adventure involving Mira Sorvino and a magic rock that glows in the dark. It all becomes all-too-apparent what's been going on by the end of this, so after plenty of mood lighting and jazz music, you're released back into the world to completely forget everything you saw.

Quiet, moody and ponderous, *Lulu on the Bridge*, writer Paul Auster's first solo directorial effort, continues to explore some of the issues that prevailed in the far superior *Smoke*, specifically the isolated, alienating nature of modern urban life, and at the same time the opportunities for new and meaningful bonds based on totally random but fateful encounters. At the center of the new movie is a mysterious romantic affair--a kind of American amour fou--between a middle-aged musician, played by Harvey Keitel, and a young aspiring actress, embodied by Mira Sorvino in one of her stronger performances.

Though intermittently touching, the film is ultimately frustrating due to the meandering nature of the riddle-like script and Auster's lethargic direction. The film has distribution deals in France and other European countries. However, despite illustrious cast, it will have hard time securing theatrical release in the U.S.

As he showed in other films adapted from his work, *The Music of Chance* and *Smoke*, Auster is intrigued by existential tales that are structured as puzzles and combine elements of myth and realism. Here, he weaves a simple yet complex tale that celebrates the magical powers of love between two lonely individuals, who despite desperate need to connect have suppressed their yearnings and immersed themselves almost blindly in their professional careers.

### **Seven Questions for "Lulu On The Bridge" Filmmaker Paul Auster**

by Stephen Garrett

"**Lulu on the Bridge**" is Paul Auster's directing debut, although 1993's "**The Music of Chance**" was his first script for the screen; and his following experiences collaborating with director Wayne Wang on 1995's "**Smoke**" and "**Blue in the Face**" was, he felt, his own film school, during which he learned everything about the craft that made it possible to undertake his first directing job alone. In the film, Harvey Keitel is a jazz saxophonist crippled by a random gunshot that leaves him unable to make music anymore. As he recuperates and finds a new balance in life, **random and magical circumstances** lead to his meeting and falling in love with an aspiring actress played by Mira Sorvino, who falls equally head over heels. More than anything, **Lulu is about true love and the pitfalls that sometimes come between fated lovers**. **Mixing fantasy with reality**, and injected with a hefty dose of romance, American critics have given *Lulu* a mixed reception here at Cannes, which possibly has served as more of a reflection on cultural tastes than on the merit of Auster's aspirations.

**"Lulu" has certain references to other films, like "Pandora's Box" and "Singin' in the Rain". Why did you decide to make these allusions?**

**Paul Auster:** Oh, you know, these things just develop, they just organically start coming together. I love "Singin' in the Rain" -- I really do think what [William Dafoe's character] says in the movie is true -- it really is about laughing your way through adversity. It's so deeply American. I really believe it's a great American contribution to the world.

**So then your film shares that same sense of being light-hearted in the face of despair?**

**Auster:** Definitely. Not to be light-hearted, but **to overcome everything, rather than be crushed by it**. Stanley Donen, the director of "Singin' in the Rain", was going to be in the film, but then he got sick and couldn't do it. He was going to play that walk-on part that David Byrne did -- I don't know if you noticed -- in the pie-in-the-face scene. David Byrne is Mira's date at the table.

**How did the cast come together?**

**Auster:** I wanted all the people that are in the film, and I asked them. Many of them I knew -- that was my casting technique.

**So you have your dream cast?**

**Auster:** I do. If you notice, when Mira walks into her bedroom and plays her telephone message, the agent was played by Stockard Channing.

**You were here last year as a member of the Cannes jury. What's it like to be here now as a director?**

**Auster:** It's as if I'm in two different places. The palm trees look the same, but everything else is different.

**Are you a little more nervous?**

**Auster:** Yeah, you bet.

**The film has sold so far in most major territories, including Canada, but not America. Why is that?**

**Auster:** There's an interesting comment from [director] John Boorman. He said he thinks Hollywood has become so pervasive and people have gone to [Hollywood movies] so often that they actually have no way of looking at other kinds of films anymore. It's not that they're not even willing to try -- it's that they can't look at them. It's like a foreign language. And I think there might be some truth to this.