

[ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT]

CHELSEA CLINTON NEWS

THE WESTSIDER

'Amongst Friends'
Running
from the
Brat Pack

BY MARK HALL AMITIN



Rob Weiss' *Amongst Friends*, the newest low-budget film to charm

the pants off this year's Sundance Festival, is cut from the same cloth as *Reservoir Dogs* or *Just Another Girl on the IRT*. It's an undiluted, violent view of a bunch of people we hope never to meet, even by accident, at high noon in a public place.

While there are many things to admire about 26-year-old Weiss' first effort at filmmaking, and the work of some of the actors is extraordinary, there are aspects of the film that are so disturbing and reprehensible as to bring into question why such a film was even made.

Amongst Friends is an examination of the bereft lives of several young people born into privilege who squander it. Slinking to low places, the characters somehow find pleasure in this purgatory of moral turpi-

tude.

The film opens with home movies of three adolescent boys on the basketball court sometime in the 1970s. We see high jinks that inform us we've a trio of good buddies. The pan of the camera reveals a slice of upper-middle-class America on Long Island that is home to the arriviste, the nouveau riche. The voice-over, as amateur as the home movies, gives a warmish homey feel that in a matter of seconds fades as we jump forward to a party at one of the boy's homes where the beer is flowing, the coke is snowing and we can be sure the folks are out of town. But this is no *Risky Business*. It's business as usual for these kids of wealth.

Herein begins the tale of three young men in their early 20s — Billy (Joseph Lindsay) the smooth operator, Trevor (Patrick McGaw), the one with a soul, and Andy (Steve Parlavecchio), the sweet kid who always seems to screw up. The party itself sets us up for the first drug deal that they're all in on. When Trevor offers to make the meet instead of Andy, he gets busted in a set-up and is sentenced to two years in jail. During Trevor's incarceration, his girlfriend, Laura (Mira Sorvino, daughter of actor Paul), takes up with Billy, whom we come to know as a prime slimeball addicted to bigger deals at the cost of anyone and anything. Sorvino is stunning but used as little more than a prop by director Weiss, who seems to view women as objects.

Soon after his release from prison, Trevor, Andy and a former inmate Friend (Brett Lambson) get tangled up in the rip-off of a local club which goes amiss, throwing them all at the mercy of the club's owner, an old Jewish gangster, Jack Trattner (David Stepkin). Fortunately for the boys, Trattner is an old buddy of Andy's grandfather, so instead of having them killed, he turns them into indentured servants until they pay back the \$25,000 they stole.

Trattner and his addled partner, Fish, sit in a diner talking, and Fish asks, "Who are these kids?" to which Trattner replies, "They're us all over again." And there you have it. Two generations later, these privileged guys who could have gone to Princeton or Yale are doing drug deals and ripping off sleaze joints.

At the end, when one friend turns

against another in violence, the life-long bonds of friendship come crashing down to a bloody climax. While all three of these young actors hold the screen with performances of conviction, none of their characters — nor anyone else depicted in the film — has a redeeming quality. There is not a glint nor gleam of real moral fiber. While *Amongst Friends* is compelling, non-formulaic filmmaking, it also painfully reflects a spiritually bankrupt society in which ignorance is the root cause. The film seems an indictment of our parents, educational system and government. God save America, for it's not the queers, commies or fundamentalists who will destroy us but our all-American capitalist greed.

Weiss says that all three of these guys are a part of him. I hope he sees his rabbi soon. If, however, he means this film as a critique of our deplorable moral state, he deserves to be ordained one. ☞



Friend (Brett Lambson), Andy (Steve Parlavecchio) and Trevor (Patrick McGraw) in 'Amongst Friends.'