

Hi, Mom!



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HI, MOM!

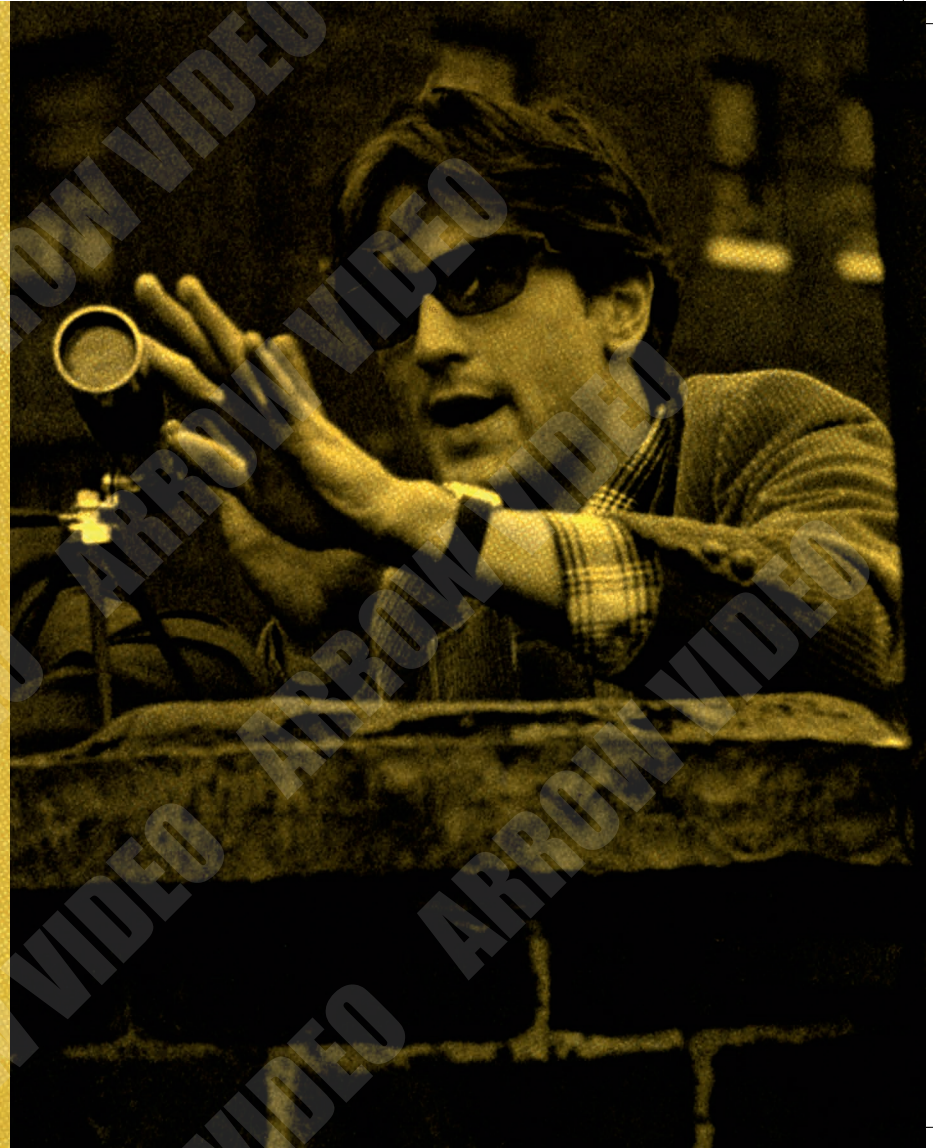
CAST

Robert De Niro Joe Rubin
Jennifer Salt Judy Bishop
Lara Parker Jeannie Mitchell
Gerrit Graham Gerrit Wood
Nelson Peltz Playboy
Charles Durning Superintendent
[as **Charles Durnham**]
Allen Garfield Joe Banner
Abraham Goren Pervert
Bruce Price Jimmy Mitchell
Ricky Parker Ricky Mitchell
Andy Parker Andy Mitchell
Robbie Heywood Roommate
Leslie Bornstein Roommate
Paul Bartel Uncle Tom Wood
Delia Abrams Date
Tofer Delaney Date
Margaret Pine Date
Hector Valentin Lino, Jr.
N.I.T. Journal Revolutionary
Carole Leverett
N.I.T. Journal Revolutionary
Ruth Bocour N.I.T. Journal
Bart De Palma N.I.T. Journal

Arthur Bierman N.I.T. Journal
Tina Hirsch N.I.T. Journal
(as **Bettina Kugel**)
Buddy Butler 'Be Black Baby' Troupe
David Connell 'Be Black Baby' Troupe
Carolyn Craven 'Be Black Baby' Troupe
Milton Earl Forrest 'Be Black Baby' Troupe
Joyce Griffin 'Be Black Baby' Troupe
Kirk Kirksey 'Be Black Baby' Troupe
Rutanya Alda 'Be Black Baby' Audience
[as **Ruth Alda**]
Beth Bowden 'Be Black Baby' Audience
Gene Elman 'Be Black Baby' Audience
Joe Fields 'Be Black Baby' Audience
Paul Milvy 'Be Black Baby' Audience
Joe Stillman 'Be Black Baby' Audience
Carol Vogel 'Be Black Baby' Audience
Peter Maloney Pharmacist
The Wendell L. Craigs Co-op Family
William Daley Co-op Resident
Floyd L. Peterson John Winnicove
Paul Hirsch Avery Gunnz
Joseph King Dr. Joe King

CREW

Music Composed and Conducted by **Eric Kaz**
Editor **Paul Hirsch**
Director of Photography **Robert Elfstrom**
Screenplay by **Brian De Palma**
Story by **Charles Hirsch** and **Brian De Palma**
Produced by **Charles Hirsch**
Directed by **Brian De Palma**





AMERICAN GODARD

by Christina Newland

If auteurism allows us to characterise the work of a single filmmaker with a few broad strokes – and we stop quibbling about that for a moment – then the mark Brian De Palma leaves on his films is vivid and distinctive. Accepted wisdom though it may be, comparing the early works of the 'Movie Brat' American filmmakers with their later triumphs feels inevitable. Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and De Palma were film school kids who made good in the 1970s with major Hollywood studio releases, but they had to cut their teeth somewhere. Largely, these were in the cash-strapped environs of their university film programmes, where they borrowed favours from friends and worked on the fly to get their initial visions to the screen.

These inauspicious beginnings often reveal the ongoing themes and preoccupations that would carry them throughout their careers. Scorsese's 1967 film *Who's That Knocking at My Door* fixed him in the social customs and psychology of urban blue-collar Italian-Americans. Brian De Palma's *Greetings* (1968) – a radically self-conscious, comic depiction of draft-dodgers released the following year – revealed a director fascinated by the mechanics of cinema itself, one whose flashily bold style would be mentioned at every career turn. Whether invoking borderline hysteria with the tautly edited suspense sequences of numerous later features or capturing the glossy maximalism of '80s Miami with *Scarface* (1983), his style has always cheerfully drawn attention to itself.

De Palma, a surgeon's son who had originally enrolled at university as a Physics student, became fascinated by European arthouse cinema and decided he would become the 'American Godard'. He set about doing so with the one-two punch of *Greetings* and *Hi, Mom!* (1970), both starring a pre-fame Robert De Niro, with the latter as a loose sequel to the former.

Hi, Mom!'s narrative speeds along with nifty ingenuity and a chaotic structure; you might say this is a film with a multiple personality disorder. Loosely divided into three jarring acts, each more wild than the last, De Palma follows a chameleonic young man, Jon Rubin, on the streets of New York City, attempting several different utterly insane ambitions.



With an obsessive use of split-focus diopter, a voyeuristic fascination with naked female flesh and a prominently fetishistic use of the camera lens, De Palma's much-vaunted copycatting of Hitchcock is, as ever, to the fore, even in early works such as *Hi, Mom!*. De Palma always treats the camera as an ambiguous tool, with invasive and transformative power, and its ability to mould real-world individuals into avatars of single-minded self-promotion is central in *Hi, Mom!*.

Those auteurist sinews are bulging through the surface of De Palma's ungainly, experimental third feature film. *Hi, Mom!* is replete with POV and camera viewfinder shots, jump cuts, split screens, keyhole dissolves, and a variety of other bag-of-tricks excess. Made for a generous \$95,000 budget after the surprise success of *Greetings*, De Palma had more to work with than most fledgling filmmakers of his kind.

Hi, Mom! opens with a handheld POV shot of seemingly ordinary encounter with a would-be landlord in a shoddy apartment. Finally, a close-up of the tenant reveals a hungry young Robert De Niro, the wayward anti-hero of this satirical tale. De Niro and De Palma's relationship began back in 1963 with De Niro's screen debut, *The Wedding Party*. Completed in 1966, it wasn't unreleased until 1969, after *Greetings*, but both the actor and the filmmaker were gaining recognition in Greenwich Village film circles – and through mutual friends, meeting the collaborators who would shape their future careers.

De Niro is the drippy glue that holds everything together in this ramshackle string of vignettes. His Jon is a budding porn filmmaker ('Peeping Jon', an impresario notes), an actor in 'Be Black Baby', and a paramilitary 'urban guerrilla', but also none of these things: he's a pretender at them all. He is a consummate joiner and expert manipulator who reads as utterly hapless at first glance. But Rubin is always scheming, first for an apartment where he can film unsuspecting neighbours through his window. In the midst of trying to make a *Rear Window* (1954)-style porno film, he begins to romance a lonely single girl, trying to stage manage an affair with her solely for the camera. When his increasingly absurd act falls apart, and the cigar-chomping impresario who's hired him sends him packing, he must find alternative means of living.

Enter local activist Garrett, seen flying for various left-wing causes around the building and also painting his entire body in black paint for the 'Be Black Baby' interactive theatre experience he's part of. Tongue-in-cheek colour turns to vérité black and white as Rubin auditions for the role of the 'pig' policeman in the play. A hilarious scene where De Niro

ad libs to a mop, pretending to be a cop shouting at a hippie protestor, only heightens the self-awareness of the conceit.

For the 'Be Black Baby' scene, filmed on 16mm, a group of bourgeois white couples are subjected to violence and terror in a dark basement in the name of 'living' the black experience in America. It takes a nasty turn when a woman is nearly raped. This vision of clueless white neo-liberals pretending to grasp the black experience is still jaggedly funny today. When it concludes, the theatregoers cheerfully recommend it as a cultural must-see, intellectualising the trauma therein.

The sequence makes metaphorical the manipulation and violation that both audience and subject are faced with by the camera. De Palma later explained in a 1983 interview, "I wanted to show in *Hi, Mom!* how you can really involve an audience. You take an absurd premise – 'Be Black Baby' – and totally involve them and really frighten them at the same time. It's very Brechtian. You suck 'em in and annihilate 'em. Then you say, 'It's just a movie, right? It's not real.' It's just like television. You're sucked in all the time, and you're being lied to in a very documentary-like setting. The 'Be Black Baby' section of *Hi, Mom!* is probably the most important piece of film I've ever done."

In the final portion of the film, Jon seemingly becomes entrenched in domestic terrorism and decides to disguise himself as a 'square' by marrying. The artificiality of Jon's faux-domestic set-up recalls a '50s sitcom, underpinned by a Weathermen Underground-style bombing that's thoroughly of the '70s. Though few might characterise the director of *Carrie* (1976) and *Scarface* as explicitly political, De Palma applies scalpel-like cynicism toward Jon's flirtation with underground social movements. Perhaps it's a young leftist's frustration with insincerity within the movement.

Still, little in *Hi, Mom!* is straightforward. In *Greetings*, De Niro's Jon was a draft-dodger; in *Hi, Mom!*, he's a veteran, seemingly displaced by his role in that war. Many comparisons have been made between this and De Niro's later role as a 'Nam vet in *Taxi Driver* (1976), but he's the real spiritual antecedent of another darkly comic role for Scorsese: Rupert Pupkin. Like the delusional wannabe of *The King of Comedy* (1983), Jon is so phony he's almost earnest in his phoniness. This is evident in the final set-up, when Jon wrangles his way to the front of a television news broadcast about the explosion he himself devised. As with so much of De Palma's work, we are watching people who are watching other people; some of whom know they're being watched and act accordingly. The intended result is a sort of endless, empty hall of mirrors; a media spectacle with no meaning.



Regarding *Hi, Mom!* now – either as a direct sequel to *Greetings* or simply as a madcap counterculture relic – it doesn't necessarily equate to coherent greatness. But it does hint at the ways in which De Palma, along with the best of his generation of filmmakers, could marry the arthouse and the commercial in their later work. When they applied the radical stylings of their art film interests to make challenging mainstream cinema of the era, the New Hollywood flowered into being.

Christina Newland is a freelance journalist on film and culture. She has written for Sight & Sound, Little White Lies, BFI, Vice and others.



ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Hi, Mom! has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films for this release and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with mono audio. An original 35mm Interpositive element was scanned in 2K resolution on a Lasergraphics Director at EFilm, Burbank. The film was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master and restored at R3Store Studios in London. The original mono mix was remastered by MGM.

All materials for this restoration were made available by MGM.

Restorations Supervised by **James White, Arrow Films**
R3Store Studios **Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin, Andrew O'Hagan, Rich Watson**
EFilm **David Morales**
Deluxe Audio Services **Jordan Perry**
OCN Labs **Joe Rubin**
MGM **Scott Grossman**

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Anthony Nield**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert** and **Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**
Blu-ray Mastering **David Mackenzie**
Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Artist **Matthew Griffin**
Design **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Chris Dumas, Daniel Griffith, Scott Grossman, Charles Hirsch, Glenn Kenny,
David Mackenzie, Christina Newland, Brad Stevens, Rick Zide



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