Peter Gerretsen's Night Friend

There is no doubt that Peter Gerretsen made Night Friend with the best of intentions. Its docudrama of the attempt of a Catholic priest to help a young prostitute on the streets of Toronto was to be, as the original title stated, "A Cry From the Heart". He also must have hoped that it could stand with Dying Up the Streets and Tickled To Death as achievements in the style. Considering that the film itself has been primarily as a cheap exploitation (Angel's, conventional melodrama (Little Ladies of the Night), or just another example of urban sordidness (Taxi Driver), it was a noble aspiration. But such aspirations count for nothing, if the execution fails to convince.

Father Jack Donnell (Chuck Shamata) is the recently appointed director of vocational education for the Archdiocese of Toronto. Returning home one night from a fundraiser, he stops at a downtown corner and honks his horn at the car ahead. Suddenly he finds a young girl beside him, asking him what we'd like and how much. Although Jack is shocked, he determines to try and help the girl (Heather Kjollesdal) who calls herself Lindsay.

Jack takes to visiting Lindsay's corner each night, dresses in creases, and offers to pay her $500-weekly quota for no services required. He gradually discovers that Lindsay, whose real name is Carol, is from Woodstock, Ontario, where she fled her incestuous father with her boyfriend Lenny (Daniel MacIvor). Lenny wants to be a rock guitarist in Los Angeles, but is hampered by the fact that he has neither money nor talent. So both Lindsay and Lenny sell themselves to Myles (Real Andrews), a smooth-talking pimp.

In the film's credibility is also further strained by, among other things, the complete absence of the police from the streets—in spite of the fact that the location for the girls' hangout is less than a block from a stationhouse. Nor is the treatment of the priest's role that realistic, although it was supposedly inspired by Father Bruce Ritter, the founder of the Covenant House youth shelters. No religious technical advisor is to be seen in the credits.

Chuck Shamata is properly earnest as Jack, but has little depth. Art Carney is the "big guest star, handles his role as the crusty Monsignor O'Brien with competence, although the part is a clerical cliché that goes back to Barry Fitzgerald, Jayne Eastwood has the thankless role of the mute bag lady who seems to serve no purpose until the end, where she becomes a literal dox ex machina.

Heather Kjollesdal's portrayal of Lindsay should not be judged too harshly, since it is her first professional role. Her passing resemblance to Jodie Foster seems to have been a factor in her casting. In making the pimp弥les a Superfly Black, and the abusive father an unshaven b lackface, Peter Gerretsen perpetuates two unfortunate stereotypes.

For film viewers, there is one other howler in Night Friend. At one point, Jack takes Lindsay to the movies. The film they see is Vagabond. Peter Gerretsen intends this to be symbolic, but how many 1984-year-olds are Agnes Varda fans?

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