

BAFTA FILM AWARDS



The Merchant Of Venice

Avenue Pictures, Navidi-Wilde Productions, Delux Productions, Imagine E Cinema, UK Film Council, Spice Factory. UK dist: Optimum Releasing

THE LOWDOWN

It has often been said that Al Pacino was born to play Shylock. He finally gets his chance in this handsomely mounted \$30m adaptation of one of Shakespeare's less frequently filmed plays. Director Michael Radford (*Il Postino*) takes a reverent approach to the text allowing the themes of anti-Semitism and intolerance to strike their own resonance for contemporary audiences. Location filming in Luxembourg and Venice has created a painterly vision of 16th century Italy. The stellar cast includes Joseph Fiennes as Bassanio, Jeremy Irons as Antonio and newcomer Lynn Collins as Portia.



MICHAEL RADFORD SAYS: "*The Merchant Of Venice* is a story of lovers who make hasty commitments

and come to understand that life is not so simple. It is also a story of revenge and betrayal, of two enemies who try to exact horrific punishments on each other. But most of all, it is the story of two communities who simply do not understand one another. It also contains one of the greatest characters in world literature: Shylock the Jew, a part that has been coveted and played by all the greatest actors in the world.

I'm very interested in the subtext. The world hasn't changed at all. The film is full of emotion. It's about people in love, revenge, hate; they're all flawed human beings and Shylock is so vulnerable."

WHAT ARE ITS CHANCES?
Al Pacino is a previous BAFTA best

actor winner for *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975). Michael Radford won the Academy's David Lean Award for Direction for *Il Postino* (1994) which also won best foreign-language film. Jeremy Irons was a best actor nominee for *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981).

The collective track record is impressive and this handsomely mounted Shakespeare adaptation has the kind of artistic pedigree that BAFTA members often tend to favour. Critical momentum has built since festival screenings at Venice and Toronto. The overall quality of the production design, costumes and sumptuous cinematography from Benoit Delhomme suggest the possibility of technical nominations to add to the chance of the bigger prizes.

WHAT SCREEN SAID:
"Pacino's performance as Shylock is masterful, presenting a man so profoundly bereaved, insulted and discriminated, his burning hatred and need for revenge are perfectly understandable, if not acceptable."

Dan Fainaru