

'Billy' looks at Mob life through different eyes

by Ched Whitney

There is an inherent risk in making a movie based on a well-known book. A risk that director Robert Benton is now feeling the consequences of after the release of his gangster movie *Billy Bathgate*.

Bathgate is based on the novel by acclaimed writer E.L. Doctorow, whose *Ragtime* was also adapted for the big screen.

The movie is based around young Billy—played by 22-year-old Loren Dean—from Bathgate Avenue. He lives with his mother who works at the local laundry earning \$4 a week. He sees himself going nowhere fast and wants to hook up with powerful gangster Dutch Schultz (Oscar-winner Dustin Hoffman).

After juggling his way into the gang, Billy is witness (but not accomplice) to Schultz's brutality. A city fire inspector has his head bashed open on the floor; Bruce Willis' Bo Weinberg, feet in a tub of concrete, makes an early departure over the side of a tug boat in the East River.

A relationship develops between Billy and Weinberg's former girlfriend, Drew Preston. Preston does not quite appreciate the danger that surrounds her. Billy goes to great measure to protect her.

The performances are good all around. Loren Dean is impressive in the title role; Nicole Kidman adds a believability to the scenes she is in as Preston. As Dutch Schultz, Dustin Hoffman is,



Dustin Hoffman heads the cast of Robert Benton's *Billy Bathgate*.

well, Dustin Hoffman. But the performance of the film is turned in by Steven Hill as Otto Berman, Schultz's business manager and

winning movie *Kramer vs. Kramer*, both won Academy Awards.

Critics have (for the most part unfairly in my judgment) criticized the deviances that the movie's script has taken from the book. Sure the book's Billy is

younger and more worldly than the movie's Billy; the character of Billy's mother is all but eliminated from the screenplay.

But still, the movie *Billy Bathgate*, as it is, is entertaining. For its genre, *Billy Bathgate* adds a refreshing outlook on lives of crime. In adapting the novel, Benton and screenwriter Tom Stoppard have chosen to view organized crime in a different light.

MOVIE REVIEW

Billy Bathgate (****)

Starring Dustin Hoffman, Loren Dean, Steven Hill, Nicole Kidman and Bruce Willis.
Directed by Robert Benton.

number one advisor. Hill takes Billy under his wing in a gruff sort of way.

Billy Bathgate is a reunion for Benton and Hoffman. The two collaborated on the 1979 Oscar-

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