

Films

Midnight Express
Directed by Alan Parker
West 11th Entertainment
Center

To see *Midnight Express* two things are mandatory — a stomach strong enough to handle uncontained and often heart-wrenching violence and a mode of transport to the West 11th Entertainment Center.

The latter is by far the easier to handle, as anyone will attest who has seen this powerful saga of William Hayes, a young American caught in Turkey with two kilos of hashish.

The movie, very simply, chronicles Hayes' story. But the story is a true one, and both the acting and the photography graphically recount it in a way that is difficult to forget.

The Turkish police nab Hayes (Brad Davis) just as he's boarding a plane for his home in the U.S. They relieve him of his hashish bundle, strip him, and invite him to turn in his drug connection. He's told, "If you cooperate you'll be on a plane home."

It doesn't turn out that way, however, and after a breathless chase through the colorful Istanbul streets, Hayes is once again apprehended, this time with a new batch of false promises on which to stake his hopes.

The Turkish prison he lands in is a fetid heap of humanity. The guards are brutes, the officials ogres, the inmates greedy squealers, hopelessly mad, or simply men who landed there by chance. The court system is beyond comprehension.

It's difficult to grasp how things could get worse, but conditions continue to degenerate through the film as Hayes is exposed to outrage after outrage. The Turkish government has decided to make "an example" out of Hayes,

and his fervent hope for a light sentence is squelched when his original sentence of four years and two months is changed to 30 years when he has only 53 days left to serve of his term.

"I find the loneliness is a physical pain, which hurts all over. You can't isolate it in one part of your body," Hayes writes from prison. But Hayes continues to have hope when there is none to be seen. The film details the human struggle to stay alive, as we see men resort to cruelty, madness, and violence.

Several portrayals in the film deserve mentioning: the sensitive picture of prison homosexuality; the emotional bond between father and son, and girlfriend and boyfriend, and the horribly real image of insanity. In addition the acting is believable and the parts of the movie which could come off trite never do.

Although the violence takes a strong stomach, the film can't be downgraded for this. It's a true, factual account of an event and as such should stand on its own and not be subject to a scissor happy, audience conscious editor in the cutting room.

The impact of *Midnight Express* can be gaged by the fact that 43 days after its May 14, 1978, debut in France at the Cannes Film Festival, the United States and Turkey entered into formal negotiations on the exchange of prisoners.

It seems almost unfair to reduce *Midnight Express* to words. Like Hayes' loneliness, the film is a feeling that spreads its ache to you. It's enough to awaken a snoozing social conscience, to rekindle one's faith in the vastness of human courage and to instill a wonder at what degrading depths it is possible for society to plunge. **By Ann Treneman**



Brad Davis, playing Billy Hayes, is visited in a Turkish jail by his girlfriend, Irene Miracle, in a sensitive scene from "Midnight Express." The film was first shown at the 1978 Cannes Film Festival and received international acclaim.

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LPs

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guitar or vocal). A *Single Man* has no recognizable stellar name.

Side One begins with a farewell tune reminiscent of his earlier ballads, "Shine on Through." Next is "Return to Paradise," currently getting a lot of FM airplay. It features a mariachi band sound with some excellent harmony, solo trumpet and guitar work. This is another farewell tune with visions of parting on some tropical beach, and hopes of meeting again.

Elton's piano handiwork blazes on "I Don't Care," a rollicking cut professing not to care about poverty and bad times as long as you've got someone to love.

Destined for infamy is a honky-tonk rendering of a sweet seduction scenario entitled "Big Dipper." The interpretation of a "big dipper" will be tastefully left to your own imagination, as will the identity of the backup vocal group listed as the Watford Football Team and The South Audley Street Girl's Choir. A nice touch ends this piece—a rewrite of Gus Kahn's "Makin' Whoopee" (and sung to the tune of): "Another ride another tune/Another crazy afternoon/ Another reason for squeezin' your big dipper."

Side One ends with a lament of love lost via Elton's sighing-crying piano. Side Two opens with more love, this time the benefits of a part-time love. "Part-time Love" features former band member

Davey Johnstone on backup vocals.

"Georgia" features the football team and the girls choir again and is very much like two cuts from *Honky Chateau* ("Slave" and "Salvation," both songs of the South). Pedal steel guitar, mandolin and church organ combine for a country twang and down-home lyrics.

A tenor sax solo shines on "Shooting Star," a tear jerker for an old friend who's become a film star — perhaps this is Bernie's tune as Taupin left the Duo to make an attempt at movie stardom.

"Madness" is a psychological look at war and terrorism with the most energy of the album's selections. Elton gets right into this one belting out MAAAADDNESS!! through the tune.

The last two cuts — "Reverie" a 52-second instrumental and "Song For Guy," a 6:34 instrumental — mellow out the energy from "Madness." Elton combines piano, mellotron, polymoog and Salena string synthesizer in a tribute to Guy Burchett, "our messenger boy who was tragically killed on his motorcycle at the age of seventeen."

Yet after a two year absence A *Single Man* somehow doesn't live up to the expectations left by *Blue Moves*. But, if you are a die-hard Elton John fan you'd best snatch this one — who knows how much longer until the next.

By Jerri Nilson