

U.S. (Fox, Embassy) 101m Technicolor

Director: Martin Scorsese

Producer: Arnon Milchan

Screenplay: Paul D. Zimmermann

Photography: Fred Schuler

Music: Robbie Robertson

Cast: Robert De Niro, Jerry Lewis, Diahnne Abbott, Sandra Bernhard, Shelley Hack, Ed Herlihy, Lou Brown, Loretta Tupper, Peter Potulski, Vinnie Gonzales, Whitey Ryan, Doc Lawless, Marta Heflin, Katherine Wallach, Charles Kaleina

Cannes Film Festival: Martin Scorsese nomination (Golden Palm)

THE KING OF COMEDY (1983)

Coming after *Taxi Driver* (1976) and especially *Raging Bull* (1980), Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* might initially seem comparatively light. But while Scorsese does play the strange tale of loser Rupert Pupkin (Robert De Niro) who is obsessed with becoming a television host, for laughs, there's a queasy uneasiness to the film.

De Niro's confident smile packs as much menace as his far more imposing creations, while his unpredictable stalker associate Masha (Sandra Bernhard) comes across as so disconnected from reality that her appearances exude an aura of anxiety. Both are colorful reminders of the lonely and perhaps dangerous characters that exist in the periphery of any urban center. Still, the crucial key to *The King of Comedy* is Jerry Lewis as TV host Jerry Langford, playing, after all those years as a patsy, more or less an arrogant, bitter, and jaded version of himself. Lewis's dramatic break from his goofy public persona blurs the difference between fact and fiction, further highlighting the delusions of Pupkin and Masha. But Scorsese seems equally interested in the power and pitfalls of fame in general, offering *The King of Comedy* as a scathing indictment of the way our society overvalues celebrity. **JKI**

From *1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die* by Steven Jay Schneider (N.Y: Barron's, 2003)