



SAMUEL GOLDWYN COMPANY

MYSTIC

Pizza

By MICHAEL GILTZ

In *Mystic Pizza*, a new romantic comedy currently playing at the Oaks Four West Theater, much is made of "Mystic Pizza," a popular local delicacy with mysterious ingredients in the sauce.

Equally mysterious is Vincent Phillip D'Onofrio, the actor who plays Bill. He has appeared in three features in roles that are wildly disparate, both in temperament and physical looks.

In *Full Metal Jacket*, D'Onofrio had the plum part of Private Leonard "Gomer" Pyle, the lumbering, overweight recruit who is turned into a killing machine all too quickly. In *Adventures in Babysitting*, he did a small turn as a mechanic who resembles Thor, the god of thunder in Norse mythology. The two films were released around the same time and

Vincent Phillip D' Onofrio tells Lili Taylor why he reads 'Applause' cover-to-cover.

the change in his appearance was so striking that it garnered D'Onofrio a lengthy article in *The New York Times*.

With the character of Bill, he faces his most improbable role yet: a young, American male who feels uncomfortable about having sex with his girlfriend, Jojo, because she won't commit to their relationship.

D'Onofrio told in a telephone interview about preparing for his role as a fisherman in Mystic, Conn.

"Before we started shooting," he said, "I was hanging out with a lot of the fishermen, trying to get to know what they were really like: the way they treated their wives, the way they looked at their girlfriends."

"I was very fortunate to have Lili (Taylor) play my girlfriend. We just wanted it to be realistic because we knew that the comedic lines would work for themselves."

Their relationship is just one of many stories in *Mystic Pizza*, an amiable, understated comedy that

Mysterious sauces and mysterious men spice up the cinema with their flavor

centers on three young women who work together in a pizza parlor. One of them, Katherine (Annabeth Gish), is a somewhat frumpy, young woman struggling to find the money to afford the tuition at Yale.

Jokingly called St. Katherine because she always does the right thing, Kat finds herself falling in love with the good looking, older man whose daughter she is babysitting while his wife is in Europe.

Her sister Daisy (Julia Roberts), is a vibrantly attractive, free-willed person who has little going for her other than the force of her personality. She becomes emotionally entangled — against her better judgement — with Charlie, a rich preppie.

The third woman is Jojo (Lili Taylor) who begins the movie by panicking on her wedding day and fainting at the altar. She spends the rest of the movie wavering between her love for Bill and her fear of making the wrong decision.

D'Onofrio enjoyed the challenge of his even-tempered, somewhat moralistic character.

"Bill was different, sort of a role reversal for a guy to play. It was also a vehicle for me to show people that I wasn't a psychopath."

That, of course, is a reference to his most visible performance, the critically acclaimed portrayal of an over-the-edge recruit in *Full Metal Jacket*. Though the part has given his career a major boost, it was also extremely demanding.

"I was with Stanley Kubrick for 13 months," he notes, sounding tired at the mere mention of it. "Just carrying that weight around and the intensity of the role — the extremes that the character goes through — weighed very heavily on me. It was something that I'm glad I did . . . something I'd never do again."

Something he *would* consider doing again is returning to the role of Bill in a sequel to *Mystic Pizza* — if the script was right.

Such an event is a distinct possibility, since the movie is turning into a quiet success story at the box office. Because it is a small film with an unknown cast, distributor Samuel Goldwyn decided to give it an unusual limited release.

Rather than pushing for a big opening weekend — an unlikely possibility at best — they have opened the movie on a relatively small 386 screens and supported it with a strong ad campaign.

Thus, *Mystic Pizza* has become one of those rare features given the opportunity to find its audience, and the gamble has paid off. The reviews have been favorable and attendance has been growing every week, indicating a positive audience response and good word-of-mouth. If all goes as planned, filming will begin next year on a sequel that picks up the storyline five years down the road.

"It's always nice to say 'Let's do a sequel,'" said D'Onofrio. "But it depends on who directs it and it

depends on what it's about. My first thought is that it is a very good idea."

And what does D'Onofrio see five years down the road for Bill and Jojo?

"I see a *lot* of children," he jokes. "I see havoc."

Mystic Pizza
was a vehicle
for D'Onofrio
to prove he
wasn't a
psychopath.