

SHUTTER ISLAND

***A Paramount Pictures Presentation. A Phoenix Pictures / Sikelia / Appian Way Production
A Martin Scorsese Film. Screenplay by Laeta Kologridis***

Film reviewed by Franco P. Visser

Hollywood has succeeded in delivering yet another psychological thriller, this time in the form of *Shutter Island*. Directed by the famed director and filmmaker Martin Scorsese, the film is based on the novel *Shutter Island* by Dennis Lehane. The viewer is immediately introduced to the world of Teddy Daniels (played by Leonardo DiCaprio), a Deputy U. S. Marshall who is sent to Shutter Island, a mental institution for the criminally insane, with his 'partner' Chuck Aule (played by Mark Ruffalo) to investigate the escape of one of its patients. Shutter Island, a facility providing "a moral fusion between law and order and clinical care". It is not long before a seemingly 'normal' investigation for Teddy and Chuck turns towards the 'abnormal'. The viewer is soon drawn into a rather psychotic and dare I say scary view of not only the mentally ill patient's lives and psychological processes, but also that of the main character of the story – Teddy Daniels.

Teddy's wife Dolores, (played by Michelle Williams) died after his three children also passed away. How this happened I do not want to divulge, as it is up to you to see how, under what circumstances and where it fits into the plot of the film (the death of his wife and three children is a rather key aspect of the story line). There is no doubt that what the viewer sees and experiences, as the movie progresses, is in great part assisted by the foreboding sounds and music that is consistently used and played throughout the movie. It is a marvellous phenomenon how music, or rather the choice of music and its use in films at key moments can make or break a film, and also of course how it can add to the fear factor of any thriller. I am sure many of you know the 'du-dum-du-dum-du-dum' tune from *Jaws*, the sense of foreboding it invoked, and its ongoing use to signal approaching danger of some sort.

Gustav Mahler's (1860 – 1911) Piano Quartet Movement in A minor plays as a continual background theme to the unfolding events of the film. Interestingly, Mahler's works were banned during the Third Reich of Adolf Hitler, and he received much criticism from those with anti-semitic feelings and views. As a celebrated composer, and more specifically a conductor of great fame, Mahler converted to Catholicism from Judaism in order to secure his position as director of the Hofoper (Vienna Court Opera) in the 1800's. Mahler's music in the film is used with stunning effect, and the choice of Mahler as composer and his Piano Quartet Movement was a stroke of genius. Teddy Daniels was a soldier in the 2nd World War where he was part of the corps that liberated the Konzentrations Lager (concentration camp)



at Dachau following what would probably be remembered as the worst human atrocity in the history of humanity.

Here already Teddy took a psychological 'knock' as he and his fellow soldiers were exposed to the aftermath of the Nazi extermination camps. The inclusion of Mahler's music that was banned by Nazi Germany, in conjunction with Teddy's wartime and post-war experiences in Germany makes for brilliant viewing. Not many people know about Mahler's background, and the meaning of the piece of music used in the film might be lost on most individuals. Next time you sit down to view a movie be sure to take care and listen to the music being used in the film that you are watching, in addition to obtain the names of the music pieces in the credits section shown after

the film's end. You might find it highly informative to research the music being used in any particular film, and you might get a more meaningful experience of any film that you choose to view. I have discovered many true musical gems from films; soundtracks and pieces of music that I still regularly enjoy, and I so hope that you can share this experience too.

But back from my raving about the joys of music, the middle of the film comes across as a psychotic nightmare, and one really struggles to keep the story line grounded in reality and logic. But nothing about the life of a severe schizophrenic is real and logical... The film's ending is sort of sad in a way, and the viewer is left feeling rather sorry for Teddy. That is if you as the viewer will reach the same conclusion and meaning as I did.

Leonardo DiCaprio delivers a performance that at first appears very over-the-top aggressive cop-like. But towards the end his acting style in this particular film makes a bit more sense. Together with other stellar actors such as Ben Kingsley and Max Von Sydow as the Doctors Cowley and Naebing respectively, *Shutter Island* makes for intense and stimulating viewing. A 'One Flew over The Cuckoo's Nest' it certainly is not, but in the end the viewer might nevertheless be pleased having viewed the whole film. As a clinician with a clinical passion for forensic work I was intrigued by the 'criminally insane' theme of the film, yet found myself desensitized to the content. Maybe as a clinician one should look out for this. What proves to be scary and dangerous to others is not scary and dangerous to one anymore. This I found particularly puzzling and interesting at the same time. Many processes, many themes and many puzzle pieces, is how I would sum up this film. It leaves an impact of some sort, positive or not, it's up to you to decide. Either way it is worth viewing, so get yourself a copy of *Shutter Island* (already out on DVD) and enjoy!