A Wedding

Joining two young people, although in this case their favorite song, which turns out to be "Heavenly Sunlight" by a Baptist church, is the wedding ceremony. The ceremony lasts much longer than anyone expected, due to the wedding planner's "sunny" attitude. The groom's grandmother has died, leaving it "in God's hands to continue the count." Finally, the groom asks his father for the Baroness' hand. "Please!" she responds indignantly, "I have to mix..." and finally asks her daughter to marry him. "I want to hear it come out of your mouth... right now that's the most important thing." They agree to meet secretly in Tallahassee, in "a small hotel across from the Dairy Queen." But at last she can't do it, can't fall prey to "mat earth thoughts."

The wedding gift is precious, including a Mercedes Benz. "What am I going to do with the other one?" asks the groom. The bride and groom perform the traditional dance to their favorite song, which turns out to be "something other than what is played," and the traditions of the day soon have their turn.

Meanwhile, some interpersonal activity is occurring. Maeve Kennedy Goddard, the bride's twin sister, can't keep her deep love for Tulip Bremser, the bride's mother, an sibling secret. But it is only after this is made public that the wedding proceeds. The bride's father asks, "How many?" Buffy starts counting on her fingers and has to refer to someone else's fingers to count the number of people. The bride and groom charge into preparations for their departure.

There are only the barest roots of A Wedding, for no selection of sketches can capture the feeling of the picture. The reason for this lies in the directorial style of Robert Altman. A few excerpts cannot recreate the whole atmosphere, since the entire picture is simply a number of overlapping plots producing this atmosphere. In A Wedding, as in M*A*S*H and Nashville, Altman's cinematic style (certainly a revolution in film style) calls for no selection of sketches can create that atmosphere by gathering a large number of characters (is it only 48?) together to interact in a broadly defined situation.

This desire on Altman's part to show us a spectrum rather than a detailed description explains his use of a widening number of characters. Since the atmosphere of a culture is the sum of the people who form it, Altman creates that atmosphere by gathering a large number of people and allowing them to interact in a broadly defined situation. The multiple plot lines in A Wedding are simply reflections of the interactions of a large number of different people.

Unfortunately, Altman's style, while creating a very real atmosphere, cannot truly create an atmosphere. It is, as it is meant to be, but it is only a simulation. It is not like, say, a Woody Allen picture, which is almost electric with comedy, but is rather like a TV sitcom, which is occasionally funny, humorlessly funny. Of course, TV shows do not have the affecting atmosphere of an Altman film, which is the primary distinction, but otherwise there is little real difference.

Watching an Altman picture, such as A Wedding, is like watching a river; one is content to sit and watch it flow by. Events such as a guy dragging the sick groom into the shower with him or an intercessial affair pass by as unappreciatively as does a leaf on the water. The viewer smiles without having to think, and is quietly led on to the next situation. Unlike M*A*S*H, A Wedding is not an uprooted picture, it is simply funny. It is not distinctly memorable, it is just pleasant.