THE ARTS

Altman lacks vision but has fun in Ready to Wear

READY TO WEAR (PRET-A-PORTER)
Directed by Robert Altman
Written by Robert Altman and Barbara Shulgasser
Starring: Marcello Mastroianini, Sophia Loren, Jason Aime, Julie Roberts, Tim Robbins, Kim Basinger, and many others.

By Scott Deskin

T he equal parts French farse, murder mystery, and fashion show chic; assembled in an international cast with no fewer than 31 characters; and mix well under the watchful, ambitious eye of director Robert Altman. The result is Ready to Wear, (formerly known as "Pret-a-Porter"), an enjoyable and haphazard comedy about the lives and loves of fashion designers, supermodels, and even journalists during the coverage of an annual springtime fashion show in Paris. True to form, Altman isn't concerned about the rather petty lives and concerns of these characters, but is focused rather on the situations they create.

The main delight for viewers is the spectacle of the fashion shows themselves, which most people never get to see: Altman wisely chose to roll his cameras on the real thing, capturing last year's spring collections and a host of real-life celebrities on celluloid. With this stock footage in a picturesque angle, Altman and co-writer Barbara Shulgasser integrate several different storylines behind the scenes.

At the head of the fashion council, Olivier de la Fontaine (Jean-Pierre Cassel) is chosen to roll his cameras on the real thing, most people never get to see: Altman wisely chose to roll his cameras on the real thing, capturing last year's spring collections and a host of real-life celebrities on celluloid. With this stock footage in a picturesque angle, Altman and co-writer Barbara Shulgasser integrate several different storylines behind the scenes.

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A woman rises from beneath a heaping mound of old dolls. Cut to a scene of a band playing power chords on a rooftop, with a chaotic building backdrop. Flash to more shots of burning toys. Interweave with fish-eye-lens building backdrop. Flash to more shots of Seether - a powerful, guitar driven aggression. Tar, in a repetitive construction that might give the impression of an industrial influence along the way were it not for the vocals, which work very well on this track with the guitar, surp a bit lower than on "Get Back."

"Seether" just kicks. A quick and upbeat feel, simple chord progression, and some good work on a guitar solo, riveted together with some harmonic vocals: "Seether" is neither loose nor tight / Seether is neither black nor white / I try to keep her on a short leash / I try to calm her down / I try to ram her into the ground / Can't fight the Seether." The group scalps...

Julia Roberts and Tim Robbins cover a Parisian fashion show from their hotel room in Ready to Wear.

A ubiquitous FAD-TV reporter Kitty Porter (Kim Basinger) tries to get fully sound bites from celebrities and designers surrounding the events. Three fashion magazine editors (Linda Hunt, Sally Kellerman, and Tracy Ullman) cover the same sadistic, voyeuristic photographer (Stephen Raci). And two American reporters (Tim Robbins and Julia Roberts), stranded in the same hotel room without proper clothes, have a cute little fling. Except for the last storyline, most characters

seem downright hostile toward their careers, a quality that can only make the story more (or humiliation) of most characters by the end of the film.

Some may find Altman's style too caustic to be enjoyable. Time magazine's Richard Corliss (in a negative review), deems the film "a hate letter to the fashion industry." Altman's previous efforts in satirizing the military in APOCALYPSE SOUTH (1970), the music industry in Nashville (1975), and the movie industry in The Player (1992) cut deeper than in Ready to Wear.

But if you're an Altman fan or a slave to fashion, Ready to Wear is an agreeable way to pass a couple of hours. For raw entertainment value, it probably beats Dumb and Dumber.

What's playing at LSC in IAP

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American Thighs

Veruca Salt rides the MTV wave with American Thighs

Veruca Salt - DGC Records

By Brian Hoffman

A woman rises from beneath a heaping mound of old dolls. Cut to a scene of a band playing power chords on a rooftop, with a chaotic building backdrop. Flash to more shots of burning toys. Interweave with fish-eye-lens building backdrop. Flash to more shots of Veruca Salt has crafted an amazing album that has so far escaped the notice of the general populace. With Nina Gordon and Louise Post on guitar and vocals, Veruca Salt weaves an often distorted, guitar-fueled musical fabric, yet manages to avoid breaking the melodic threads, balancing their album out with the group taking as its mainstay simple chords and chord progressions. Yet, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Veruca Salt achieves a sound varying from the exhilaratingly bright to the broodingly dark over the length of their disc.

"Get Back" catapults their album American Thighs off to a great start, with noisy, distorted guitar, soulful lead vocals, and some harmonic, yet dazed and confused sounds. "I'm so sorry lady / So sorry now / I got your sister / I shot her down / I try to calm her / I try to ram her into the ground / Can't fight the Seether." The group scalps...

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