

# The Wedding's a Party

by Glenn Walton

Scholars take note: the comedy of manners is struggling to be reborn in the work of director Robert Altman. His earlier **MASH** was a bloody and amiable satire on war; **Nashville** a broadly tragicomic view of the show-biz as politic as showbiz fact of contemporary American society. In **A Wedding**, shown last week in the Cohn, Altman turns his considerable comic talents to that ritual of transition, the joining in holy matrimony of two human beings. The action takes place in a house, on agreed-upon terms and conventions that the director, while mercilessly lampooning, does not quite reject.

The premise is simple, and good. Two upper class American families meet and are joined legally in church, then adjourn to the groom's home for the reception. The film ends as the guests leave the

wonderfully by old star Lillian Gish) very inconveniently dies while awaiting the return of the wedding party, and provides the first frantic intrigue: how to conceal her demise from the revellers? A prim and proper reception hostess runs around barking commands; in the house and grounds a Mafia of security persons patrols with deadly seriousness. Upon them descend the overfed, overpaid, overbearing families, and the fun is on. Couples meet and fall in lust and love, or out of it. There are the usual drug and alcohol problems, political differences; ensemble acting is the order of the day, and the plots and subplots proliferate. What holds them together is Altman's fine eye and ear for social ritual, and what passes the great American heartland. In all there is scarcely a sane or 'normal' person; Altman keeps cracking the whip be-

comedienne wisely holds herself back from the burlesque characterizations of her variety series and delivers a broadly funny portrait of a woman positively buried by her roles as mother and wife. What could have been a tragic character, however, never emerges; instead we are treated to a greenhouse meeting that teeters on the brink of plain meanness on Altman's part, as he makes fun of the romantic pretensions of the ill-matched lovers.

I have another minor complaint, one I get tired of making. Altman throws in a Fag Predator, and, to show that he's liberated, a Dyke Predator too. Fair enough; gay people are no more perfect than straight, but it gets positively tiring to see them constantly depicted as molesters of innocent victims (here the virginal bride and a drunk groom). Fact: most



same evening. In between the ceremony and the last good-byes, the clash of human personalities provide enough comic energy to keep Altman's film consistently entertaining. While his script and direction lack the polish and social coherence to be a true comedy of manners, the film is in its rough way the closest thing in current cinema to the form, a sort of low species that occasionally bursts into high comedy, while remaining essentially farcical.

The film is funny from the very first frame, when the pretentious symbols of complacent Christianity are mocked. The wedding itself is curiously unjoyous; the real emotions are below the surface, ready to spill out at the first drink. At home, the dowager grandmother (played

hind their heels, and his characters seldom evoke more than sympathy, or move one as they might in a fuller, 'rounder' treatment.

It would be impossible to credit all the performances, from such diverse actors and actresses as Gish, Mia Farrow, Desi Arnez, Nina van Pallandt, Dina Merrill, et al, except to say that they all get into the fun of it and emote for all its worth. Of courisity value is Carol Burnett's performance as Tulip, a homely mother of the bride who between God and her boredom with her oppressive patriarchal husband has a hard time fending off the advances of an equally unattractive suitor, with whom she arranges a rendezvous in a motel in Tallahassee. This skilled

rapists and child molesters are heterosexual men, (the latter mostly middle-aged seducers of little girls). Yes, there is a macho Italian brother who grabs the female photographer (Lauren Hutton) but we all know deep down he's good-hearted when in the end he and his brother escape the chaos in a joyous drunken exit by sportscar. Does Altman lack the genuine compassion for his characters that could give his films emotional power? The one character that is more human than caricature, that of the groom's level-headed sister, remains undeveloped.

Maybe in the future, Altman will flesh out his farces; right now we must be content with the sharpness with which he cuts up his victims.

You'll be surprised at some of the people you'll meet at

**BACK STREET IMPORTS**

finest selection of posters in Eastern Canada  
rock & new wave buttons  
silk-screened T-shirts  
fine art greeting cards

located at 5189 Prince Street at Barrington in Downtown Halifax

Practical \* Versatile \* Affordable

See the Fall and Winter fashions at

**Foreign Affair**  
1705 Barrington St.  
429-1407

**Easy Street**  
5686 Spring Garden Rd.,  
429-5013

**THE CUTTING FACTORY LTD.**

Male: \$8.00  
Female: \$12.00