



W. Hurst

Director Robert Altman spent only 19 days and \$800,000 to make *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, at a time when many films cost millions for salaries alone and shooting schedules run into months. And Altman has produced a burnished nugget that outclasses every other American film in current release.

Focusing on a 1975 reunion of five Disciples of James Dean, this film follows in the tradition of Edward Albee and Tennessee Williams: In a confined space and time, a small cast of peculiars joke, fantasize and kick for the emotional groin. The reunion becomes a spectacle of verbal and physical abuse. Sissy, Mona and Joanne are the gladiators at the center.

Sissy, the town tart and roller

skater extraordinaire, is played by Cher (yes, of Sonny and...) who uses raunchy one-liners, blunt observations and old-fashioned sexual narcissism to create a credible woman. Sissy tells Mona that she looks "like she was rode hard and put away wet." When she isn't revelling in sexual shell-shocking, she is primping and puffing. The character may not be complex but Sissy has emotional resonance and the guts of a survivor.

Mona (Sandy Dennis) has mythologized her life and beatified James Dean. Her gestures and speeched re-inforce her battle against reality. Lips flinch into a smile. Her chin veers away from her neck as she needlessly strokes her dank hair. According to her immediate need, Mona can garble her speech or assume the sang-froid of a talk show host.

Disciples of Dean, myths and magic make Altman film glow

However, she occasionally surprises everyone, including herself, by exploding. Overcome by self-righteous rage, the mannerisms disappear and a more vital woman emerges. In other performances, Sandy Dennis has relied on these same excessive mannerisms. However, Altman has played this habit against Dennis and allowed her to display strength and vitality that is believable but unexpected.

Karen Black, as Joanne, has the questionable honour of playing a sex-change who is traumatized by the re-assignment. Black has the triangular back and slim hips usually considered masculine. She layers her physicality with movement and poses like someone imitating a woman--not someone who is a woman.

In 1955, when the Dean club was formed, Joe was an awkwardly pretty boy. Twenty years later, Joanne is an awkwardly pretty woman. Joanne reveals that she is not happy as a woman, that the operation was a mistake. This single, simply-stated admission validates the odd gestures and theatrical poses. Joanne is a man encased in a woman's body.

Altman's directorial powers may

go initially unnoticed, as he does not grandstand and intrude on the film's progress. The entire cast is his personal choice, and he has drawn each woman to produce characterizations of exceptional clarity and definition. With this same cast, he directed a stage version of *Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, which flopped. His direction here seems so attuned to the cinematic possibilities of the script that a stage version seems impossible.

A ruddy sepia tone colours the film. This, combined with an arid lighting makes the sweaty summer afternoon palpable. A grittiness can almost be seen on the counter tops. Also, with the script as a guide, Altman slides from 1975 to 1955 and back again, but without special effects or youth enhancing make-up

for his cast. With lighting and dialogue, the year is clearly established.

Altman has taken a further risk by retaining the cliches of the stage script and the risk pays off. These women use cliches because they are useful: everyone understands what is being said and yet you can protect your inner-self. However, like Mona's gestures, the cliches disappear when unstudied emotions demand unstudied speech.

Robert Altman shows what can be done with ingredients at hand—a single set, Hollywood mythology and everyday dreams, among other things. *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* is not just the work of a director. It's gold from an alchemist.

The Crucible at Theatre Plus

Morality monsters destroy freedom

C. Higdon

In Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, conscience is not a private matter. It is, frighteningly and feverishly, a matter of state administration.

This play is about more than the rise in McCarthyism. In the introduction, Miller suggests that "a political, objective, knowledgeable campaign from the Right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance." By choosing *The Crucible*, Theatre Plus has undertaken more than just a play about historic witch trials.

Immersed in their own divinity, the 'judges' of the 1692 Salem witch trials condemn to death dozens of people who have been singled out by a vengeful girl and her fearful accomplices. The play should have made us angry. But it didn't. This production never realized the sense of futility inherent in the plot and script. The climax, Proctor's death, is moving because most deaths are,

but the symbolism of his needless death is lost.

Running three hours, *The Crucible* is a long and spare play. Lack of character depth and wooden acting weaken this production. Large combinations of actors hinder rather than focus the inherent intensity.

However, several performances do reach across the proscenium. Martha Henry, as the accused and therefore guilty Elizabeth Proctor, is particularly effective. As the play's most subtle character, Henry emphasizes Elizabeth's powerlessness by holding a quiet force in check. Nancy Barclay is also extremely believable as Mary Warren, the contradictory, terrified house-maid.

Jennifer Hogan's Abigail is a convincing and crazed antagonist. However, Les Carlson, as Reverend Parris, bumbles about the stage melodramatically, giving an ineffectual performance.

Most disappointingly, David Fox's John Proctor gestures make it difficult to hear the words. He

gnashes his teeth, staggers and sways for most of the play. Not until the end, when he faces his death, does his physical hysteria match his emotional trauma.

The play moves slowly but still draws the audience into its power. Is this the work of the director, Alan Scarfe, or the playwright?

We are struck by the idiocy and blindness of those who would tie God and State to prohibit individual freedom. We are reminded that for the sake of one individual's political embarrassment, many will die. There is also a powerful struggle of a wife and husband to understand one another and a husband's tears for having unwittingly betrayed his wife. Therefore, *The Crucible* hits nerves regardless of the production's weaknesses.

The play is relevant and has impact because we continue to be subject to the morality and righteousness of those who singularly consider themselves moral--and the majority.

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