

Altman stabs Hollywood in his brilliant 'Player'



Burt Reynolds is among Hollywood notables that make cameo appearances in Robert Altman's "The Player."

Taking jabs at the crassness of Hollywood has always been like shooting fish in a barrel. Ever since Columbia's Harry Cohn in the 1930s, the studio mogul has been typified as a cigar-chomping dictator with absolutely no taste or integrity.

"The Player," the latest from Robert Altman, brilliantly updates the Tinseltown story. Here, Tim Robbins plays Griffin Mill, a senior vice president of production at a major studio. Tall, slightly boyish in his expensive tailored suits, he is wise to all the angles, including rumors that someone is after his job.

To make matters worse, a disgruntled writer has been sending threatening postcards to Mill. Sitting through records of the hundreds of writers he brushes off every month, he narrows the names down to one and eagerly confronts him at a screening of "The Bicycle Thief."

From here, "The Player" takes an audience on so many surprising twists and turns that it would be a sin to reveal much more about the plot. It opens this weekend at the Lincoln Center and is already out following a nearly sold-out benefit screening at the Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor.

It's certainly no secret that countless big-name actors and actresses have walked in the film. They practically stood in line to work with Altman when they heard that his next project would tackle the studio.

At restaurants, parties, bars and studio offices, you'll see such familiar faces as Susan Sarandon, Cher, Nick Nolte, Anjelica Huston, Bruce Willis, Jack Lemmon, Peter Falk, Lily Tomlin, John Cusack, Harry Belafonte and Jella Roberts, just to name a few.

MORE THAN just name-dropping, they provide a realistic element that takes you so close to the business of making movies that you'll completely

tickets please

John Monaghan

ly forget that you're watching one.

Many have the chance to take their own pokes at the type of studio executive represented by Mill. Malcolm McDowell corners Mill in a hotel lobby. Burt Reynolds greets him congenially and then talks about him behind his back.

Other character actors take on roles, including Dean Stockwell as one in a series of "pushy" writers. Whoopi Goldberg is a police detective and Fred Ward is the head of studio security. Recording artist Lyle Lovett makes his film debut as a mysterious man who may be on the executive's trail.

Peter Gallagher, the faithless hand from "Sex, Lies and Videotape," has the best in a string of memorable lines. As the up-and-coming young exec hot for Mill's job, he's on

his way to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

"I didn't know you were an alcoholic," Mill says.

"I'm not," the young player replies. "But that's where all the best deals are getting made lately."

Perhaps the biggest star in "The Player" is Michael Tolkin. You may not recognize his cameo as a young writer with yet another pitch for Mill, but he wrote the brilliant screenplay for this film, based on his novel. He has a perfect ear for Hollywood-speak.

TOLKIN WAS determined not to deliver yet another story of a young writer struggling to hold onto his integrity in the studio system (see "Barton Fink" and "City of Angels"). The picture he paints is full of gray

areas, especially concerning Mill, who has at least two moments where he can be likable despite all the cut-throat wheeling and dealing.

Director Altman, meanwhile, adds clever homages to films past. The opening scene, which lasts several minutes in one continuous shot, recalls Orson Welles' opening from "Touch of Evil." One of the characters even makes a reference to it.

When the plot thickens and you don't know who is after Mill, the camera lingers on a photograph of Alfred Hitchcock.

Since his early successes with "MASH" and "Nashville" in the 1970s, Robert Altman has had a love-hate relationship with Hollywood. His films have been made outside the studio system whenever possible and, until now, have failed to attract wide audiences.

"The Player" has the potential to make more money than all of his other films put together. It will appeal to both fans of the director's work and those hooked on the inside scoop dish out nightly on "Entertainment Tonight." Whatever category you fall into, see this film soon before you hear too much more about it.

'Object' is disappointment

pass the popcorn



LeAnne Rogers

scenes by Peter Riegert. MacDowell suggests stashing her statue with a friend and reporting it stolen, giving their cash flow a jump start with an insurance settlement.

Malkovich proposes selling the "Object of Beauty" to raise some money but MacDowell doesn't want to part with it. When the statue mysteriously disappears, the couple start suspecting each other.

As a comedy, the film has a few humorous moments, most supplied by Bill Paterson as the hotel detective trying to locate the statue. There are a few glimpses that Malkovich's character realizes his own shallowness and the superficiality of his life, but it's never really developed.

The couple is unrelentingly self-centered and manipulative, even to the point of Malkovich romancing MacDowell's best friend after he thinks she has hidden the statue.

THE FILM really doesn't work at all as a mystery since its immediately clear who took the statue and why. The most genuine character and performance comes from Rudi Davies, a pale sad-faced deal-mate who works at the hotel as a maid. She lives in a small run-down flat with a brother. Perhaps the only comment Lindsay-Flegg successfully makes with the film is on the true value of beauty and art.

Malkovich sees the statue as a source of cash; MacDowell has a sentimental attachment. The brother and his small time criminal cronies don't see any value in the work until the insurance company offers a reward.

As for the maid, her reaction speaks to the essential quality of art and beauty.

"It spoke to me," she says of the statue.

SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (45)

"A Woman's Tale" (Australia — 1991). 7 and 9:30 p.m. May 1-2 and 4 and 7 p.m. May 3. From Paul Cox, the director of "Man of Flowers" and "Vincent," comes this well-told story of an aging woman and her family coming to grips with her illness.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2037 for information. (Free)

"Glory" (USA — 1956). 7 p.m. April 27. Margaret O'Brien and Walter Brennan star in the story of a woman who tries her best to train her horse Glory for a big race.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE, 22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (45)

"Spike and Mike's Festival of Animation," through May 2, (call for show times). From the crazed California team of Spike and Mike, a collection of offbeat contemporary animation. Highlights include "Street Sweepers," "Mona Lisa Descending a Staircase" and this year's Academy Award winner "Manipulation."

"Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation," 9:30 and 11:30 p.m. May 1-2. A wicked collection of some of the sickest cartoon shorts ever created. Along the way, you'll meet such off-color creations as "In-Bred Jed" and "Dog Pile." No one under 17 will be admitted.

MAPLE THEATRE, 4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield. Call 855-9091 for information. (\$5.75; \$2.95 twilight show)

"Antonia and Jane" (Britain — 1991). A British comedy about two women — one a cool beauty, the other a lost soul — who spend each year preparing for their annual reunion lunch. Directed by Beeban Kidron.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 668-8297 for information. (\$5; \$4 students and senior citizens)

"Stop Making Sense" (USA — 1984). 9:40 p.m. April 27. David Byrne and Talking Heads captured live in concert. Directed by Academy Award-winner Jonathan Demme.

"Excalibur" (Britain — 1981). 7 p.m. April 27. John Boorman's visually arresting version of the King Arthur story should always be seen on the big screen.

"Camelot" (USA — 1967). 7 p.m. April 28. King Arthur returns, this time played by Richard Harris, in the slapdash film version of the Lerner and Lowe stage musical.

"Quadruphonia" (Britain — 1979). 10:15 p.m. April 28 and 8:50 p.m. April 29. Music by The Who underscores the violent battle between Moors and Hockers in 1960s London.

"Monsieur Pythias and the Holy Grail" (Britain — 1974). 7 p.m. April 29-30. The best film by the British comedy troupe takes on the King Arthur legend.

"The Spinal Tap" (USA — 1984). 8:50 p.m. April 30 and 9:30 p.m. May 1. Rob Reiner directed this cult favorite about an atrocious, but lovable, heavy metal band.

STATE WAYNE THEATRE, 35310 Michigan Ave., Wayne. Call 326-4600 for information. (\$2; \$1 students and senior citizens)

"The Searchers" (USA — 1956). April 28-May 3 (call for show times). John Wayne and John Ford teamed up for what may be their finest film in this powerful portrait of an Indian hater on the trail of the tribe that kidnapped his niece. Jeffrey Hunter joins in the search.

"The Three Faces of Eve" (USA — 1957). April 29-May 3 (call for show times). Joanne Woodward coped an Academy Award for her portrayal of a schizophrenic woman with multiple personalities. Lee J. Cobb plays the psychiatrist who tries to cure her.

— John Monaghan

IN CONCERT

Continued from Page 6

● **Park the Karma**
Lila's 51, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck
7:55-6:55

● **Incurables**
Pinney's Pub, 3855 Woodward, Detroit
8:15-9:00

● **The Civilians**
With The Burroughs and Morrison's
Laver at Gruff's Grill, 16 N. Saginaw,
Pontiac
5:57-6:24

Saturday, May 2

● **Swans**
With Machines of Loving Grace
St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress,
Detroit. Tickets \$2.50 in advance
● **961-MELT**
Southgoing 243
Blind Pig, 206 & S. First, Ann Arbor

● **996-5555**
Larry McCray
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor

● **906-2748**
Crowded Wire
Lila's 51, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck

● **875-6555**
Tom Exort
With Arctic Soul at Hamtramck
Pub, 2049 Caniff, off I-75

● **365-3829**
The Mind
With King Friday at Psyche's
Lounge, 2930 Caniff, off Jos. Campus,
Hamtramck

● **874-2254**
FIREHOUSE
With Antenna at Alvin's, 5756 Cass,
across from Wayne State University,
Detroit

● **632-2355**
Larry McCray
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor

● **996-2747**



Antenna will be performing with FIREHOUSE Saturday, May 2, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit.

GREEKTOWN ART FAIR

May 1-3
Friday 11-10pm
Saturday 12-10pm
Sunday 12-5pm

Featuring the Greek Town Art Fair, which has been a tradition for over 10 years. The fair features a wide variety of art, including paintings, sculptures, and crafts. There are also live performances and a children's area.

Sponsored by:

BACARDI
STROHS
MCI
CANNETT
Locke Benline

On the Town

Are you looking for friends to share your interests?



Try our new personal column—coming May 4th in your hometown newspaper:

PERSONAL Scene
YOUR PERSONAL PEOPLE CONNECTION
TO PLACE YOUR AD, CALL 591-0900