



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

3 Women

3 Women

Director: Robert Altman
©/Production Company:
Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation
Production Company: Lion's Gate Films
Producer: Robert Altman
Associate Producers: Robert Eggenweiler,
Scott Bushnell
Post-production Supervisor: Bill Sawyer
1st Assistant Director: Tommy Thompson
2nd Assistant Director: Carol Himes
Screenplay: Robert Altman
Director of Photography: Chuck Rosher
Editor: Dennis Hill
Visual Consultant: J. Allen Highfill
Art Director: James D. Vance
Wardrobe: Jules Melillo
Make-up: Monty Westmore
Hairstylist: Kaye Pownall
Title Design: Dan Perri
Music: Gerald Busby
Flute Soloist: Michael Carloff
Sound: Jim Webb, Chris McLaughlin
Re-recording Mixer: Richard Portman
Sound Editors: David M. Horton, Bill Phillips
Cast:
Shelley Duvall (Mildred 'Millie' Lammoreaux)
Sissy Spacek (Mildred 'Pinky' Rose)
Janice Rule (Willie Hart)
Robert Fortier (Edgar Hart)
Ruth Nelson (Mrs Rose)
John Cromwell (Mr Y.R. Rose)
Sierra Pecheur (Ms Vivian Bunweill)
Craig Richard Nelson (Dr Graham Maas)
Maysie Hoy (Doris)
Belita Moreno (Alcira)
Leslie Ann Hudson (Polly)
Patricia Ann Hudson (Peggy)
Beverly Ross (Deidre Black)
John Davey (Dr Norton)
USA 1977©
123 mins

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3 Women literally came from a dream. It didn't come from a dream in the way that I dreamed this, what I dreamed was that I was making this film. Or was going to. Catherine, my wife, had gone in to the hospital with a rather serious condition and I had just had a film aborted. I got home and my youngest son and I looked out at the beach, and I got into bed, and it had been a trying couple of days, and I dreamed this film. I woke up and took the yellow pad next to my bed and wrote a sketch for *3 Women* and went back to sleep. Then I dreamed more of it and woke to write some more. I cast it. Then I had two of the fellas that worked for me at the time came into the bedroom and I told them to go down to Palm Springs because we were going to shoot this in the desert but I wanted to be close to some fun.

Then I woke up. There was sand in my bed from my son, I hadn't written anything down, I didn't have a pad next to my bed. So I had dreamed the title, *3 Women*, and this image of where it took place. I got on the telephone to someone who was working for me and said, 'I found a terrific story. It takes place in the desert...da-da-da.' And the next day I was in Alan Ladd's office at Fox, and the next day we were driving to Palm Springs to look for locations. That really did come together out of a dream, but not the specifics of the film.

Robert Altman in conversation with Geoff Andrew at the National Film Theatre, 24 January 2001

Interestingly enough, since he definitively abandoned the Hollywood genres with *Nashville*, Altman seems to have been intent on inventing a new kind of popular entertainment, a form in which the communal enterprise and creativity of actors, technicians and, ultimately, the audience count for more than any individual viewpoint. In this is both self-protection – the 'meaning' of the films becomes a function of what everybody puts into them, rather than of what the director intended to say – and some extreme form of the liberal quandary, how to give direction while seeming (or pretending) not to.

The idea [for *3 Women*] reputedly came to Altman in a dream: a picture of some ersatz, miniature suburbia set down in the Southern California desert, with actresses Shelley Duvall and Sissy Spacek already cast as two girls (one endlessly prattling about dates and domestic minutiae, the other a strangely wide-eyed, all-consuming adolescent) who share an apartment and work at a nearby geriatric spa. The film was a departure for Altman for many reasons. For once, the central performances were precise in meaning and execution, and ambiguity was derived not from some vague nexus of improvisation but from an indefinite context in which the interplay of colour and landscape suggested incipient transformations of a spiritual/psychological/metaphysical order. Altman seemed to have found his way through to a level of consciousness where he need no longer be frightened of the grandeur of his themes – youth and age, growth and change, civilisation and savagery – nor have to pretend that their exact significance depended on interactions beyond his control.

Their exact significance, of course, was never actually decided by the film. Altman remained sufficiently himself to ensure that no final interpretation could be ascribed to the director; but his approach had, for the moment, been turned around. Instead of presenting the audience with a mix of ambiguous characters and events, and Panavision imagery of indeterminate emphasis, to allow them

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Miller's Crossing

Tue 1 Aug 20:40; Sat 12 Aug 15:20; Mon 14 Aug 18:10

Sawdust and Tinsel (Gycklanas afton)

Wed 2 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Tue 22 Aug 20:45

The Night of the Hunter

Thu 3 Aug 20:50; Sat 26 Aug 18:10; Tue 29 Aug 20:50

The Bigamist

Fri 4 Aug 20:45; Wed 9 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by Aga Baranowska, Events Programmer)

3 Women

Sat 5 Aug 20:30; Sun 20 Aug 18:25

La Peau douce (Silken Skin)

Sun 6 Aug 18:30; Thu 24 Aug 20:45

In the Mood for Love (Huayang Nianhua)

Mon 7 Aug 18:10; Fri 18 Aug 20:45; Fri 25 Aug 18:20

Charulata (The Lonely Wife)

Tue 8 Aug 20:35; Wed 16 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by Professor Chandak Sengoopta, Birkbeck College, University of London)

Brief Encounter

Thu 10 Aug 18:30; Sun 20 Aug 13:20

Merrily We Go to Hell

Fri 11 Aug 18:20; Wed 23 Aug 18:15 (+ intro by author and film journalist Helen O'Hara)

Love Is the Devil: Study for a Portrait of Francis Bacon

Sat 12 Aug 20:40; Wed 30 Aug 18:10 (+ intro)

Mildred Pierce

Sun 13 Aug 15:40; Mon 21 Aug 20:45; Mon 28 Aug 15:10

Beau travail

Tue 15 Aug 20:45; Mon 28 Aug 18:30

Red River

Thu 17 Aug 20:20; Sun 27 Aug 15:20

Blue Velvet

Sat 19 Aug 17:45; Thu 24 Aug 18:10; Thu 31 Aug 20:35

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to resolve matters as best they could, *3 Women* seemed to sparkle with a clarity of image and idea which came together as ambiguity in the spectator's mind. The 'dream' context conceivably released Altman's inhibitions about being seen to take too strong a hand in ordering reality, whereas in normal naturalistic circumstances his personal contribution is guarded, indirect or ringed about with self-mocking qualification (most noticeably so in *A Wedding*). Even in *3 Women*, he has been inclined to skimp the full potential for metaphor – or to avoid the risk of incurring pretentiousness – by making easier connections in terms of plot and character. (The last third of the film is an unseemly job of tidying up.) But *3 Women* avoids Altman's worst tendency of indulging his cast and cheating his audience – by keeping his ideas out of harm's way – for long enough to make one regret that so far it remains an isolated experiment in his career.

Richard Combs, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1979

Robert Altman's new film belongs to that rare category of imaginative works which defy analysis. Whatever the 'ideas' in it, they seem, both during its two hours running time and on later reflection, to be irrelevant. *3 Women* is a vision. It happens to use an enormous number of complex and sometimes wayward cinematic and narrative devices, and I can understand how alert and sensitive cinemagoers may be affronted by what they take to be perverse, obscurantist or downright pretentious. It is so rich and mysterious in its imagery that it is bound to set off radically personal reactions. There will be those who reasonably ask what it is 'about': Feminism? The nature of identity? The heartlessness of the consumer society? I can only report that I was absorbed throughout and that pondering later I cannot find any of these questions important.

Standing before Bosch's painting 'The Garden of Earthly Delights' in the Prado we do not ask about meaning; later, reading that much of the imagery comes from the beliefs and habits of obscure religious and social sects acting on a profoundly paranoid imagination does little to help one's appreciation. One has been affected by a mystical apprehension of fear and beauty. To pursue this image in the same museum: confronting Velasquez' 'Las Meninas', an equally great work, there is nothing one does not want to know about the artist's use of space and paint; one wants to learn exactly what his political, emotional and artistic intentions were. There is an intellectual ferocity about the painting which invites critical scrutiny. So in Altman's *Nashville* there is a tumultuous social and political subtext which breaks through the imaginative substance of the film. *3 Women* is certainly not a parable, and I don't think it is even an allegory, let alone a 'statement'. It is a vision of love.

Julian Jebb, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1977