The Many Hats of Robert Altman: A Life in Cinema

Daub, Peggy; Gomis, Melissa; Hallman, Phil

http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/110220
Mockumentary

Tanner ’88 (1988)

As early as Nashville, Robert Altman had had his actors mingle with the real stars of the Country & Western music capital. Tanner ’88 is a much more ambitious and sly blending of documentary and fiction, written by Doonesbury creator Garry Trudeau and set during the presidential primary season of 1988. It was created as an 11-episode miniseries for HBO and follows the campaign of fictional presidential candidate and former Michigan Representative Jack Tanner as he campaigns against Jesse Jackson and Michael Dukakis. One reviewer described this as “a kind of guerrilla filmmaking” and likened Altman to a sculptor using “found materials” since the other candidates were not told in advance that this fictional candidate would be among them on the primary circuit. The series was rebroadcast in 2004 to coincide with presidential primaries that year.

Coincidentally, there was a John Tanner also campaigning while Tanner ’88 was being broadcast. John Tanner (not to be confused with Jack Tanner, the character of the series) was successfully elected to Congress from Tennessee, and here humorously shares his condolences on Jack Tanner’s loss and invites Altman, actor Michael Murphy, and writer/producer Garry Trudeau to attend the celebration when he is sworn into office.