The Many Hats of Robert Altman: A Life in Cinema

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Nashville (1975) is arguably the most highly acclaimed Altman film, in large part due to the fantastic sound throughout it. This film is a perfect example of a large ensemble cast, which was to become an Altman trademark. In its time Nashville was widely labeled as the best portrayal of the United States of America in any film to date. Altman’s masterful use of music as well as overlapping dialogue permeates the film and creates an incredible auditory experience from start to finish.

The song Keith Carradine wrote for his character to perform in Nashville became an instant hit and won the Academy Award for Best Original Song in 1975. Carradine’s character sings this song in a music club, preceding it with a dedication to a “special someone.” Several women in the crowd think he is singing exclusively for them. In reality, he has slept with all of them and has them all under the impression that they have his heart. This poignant scene is comprised of alternating shots between Carradine and each of the women he has tricked.

Altman was known for creating an accurate portrayal of the era in which his films take place. In this essay for a new CD of Nashville’s music he speaks of this intention to be authentic. Altman’s deliberate use of songs of all forms and quality display the range of the music industry in Nashville in 1974. Having a song written by the performer whose point of view it is portraying helps increase the depth and believability of character, which is a consistently strong point in Altman films.

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